ACTORS of the Century

Dorothy M. Kemp

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Actors of the Century

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MISS ELLEN TERRY AS "IMOGEN."

From a photograph by Window and Grove.

Actors of the Century

A Play-Lover's Gleanings from Theatrical Annals

By

Frederic Whyte

Translator of "The English Stage" by M. Augustin Filon



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PREFACE

THE story of the modern English stage has been written in some scores of volumes, big volumes and little, brilliant and dull, veracious and less veracious—biographies, histories, reminiscences, memoirs, miscellanies. Familiar to the student and critic of the theatre, these volumes to most people are practically unknown. They form a kind of tranquil backwater, down which the General Reader, borne along upon the swift and swollen current of contemporary literature, seldom or never finds his way. Down this backwater I myself drifted quite recently and by chance. On it, ever since, I have been pleasantly "marooned." I have sought, in this book, to make it known to others.

Do I wrong those others in imagining them to be unfamiliar, most of them, with the history of the stage? Mrs. Siddons and John Kemble, Mrs. Jordan and Robert William Elliston, according to a distinguished critic of to-day, are "personalities within the ken of every educated man." I wonder! For my own part, a few years ago I knew next to nothing of them. Of Mrs. Siddons herself, the most famous of them all, I knew only what might be learnt from her portraits by Reynolds and Gainsborough: I had not heard even the anecdotes connected with these two paintings; how Reynolds, having finished his representation of her as "The Tragic Muse," paid her the matchless compliment of affixing his signature thereto, "upon the hem of her garment," that his name, as he said, might go down in this way to posterity; and how Gainsborough turned once from his easel and cried out to her with whimsical impudence (and not *entirely* without provocation), "Damn your nose, madam!—there's no end to it!" My ideal reader is he, or she, who will come to these pages as ignorant

of my subject as I was then, but as ready to be interested and entertained.

But I have been speaking as though the text were the principal feature of the volume, whereas from the very first I have regarded it as subsidiary to the illustrations. M. Adolphe Beau's old photographs—a veritable treasure-trove, hidden, practically, all these thirty or forty years—formed the nucleus of my collection. They aroused so much interest among the friends to whom I showed them that it seemed a pity they should not be shown also to the world at large. In "The Pall Mall Magazine"[1] for July, 1897—the "Jubilee Number"—I had got together some others, old and new, as illustrations to an article on the Victorian stage. With these as a beginning I started out to make a fairly comprehensive portrait gallery. Here is the result.

In conclusion, I have but to express my thanks to those who have helped me in various ways; to the Editor of "Vanity Fair" for allowing me to enliven my collection with so many of "Spy's" admirable caricatures, and with one of "Ape's" as well—that of Charles Mathews; to Sir Henry Irving and Mr. Bernard Partridge for the use of two striking portraits from "Lyceum Souvenirs"; to Sir Squire Bancroft, who kindly lent me a number of very interesting photographs; to M. Adolphe Beau, and my friends Mr. Tighe Hopkins and Mr. Walter Shaw-Sparrow, for the original contributions I have secured from their pens. Nor can I end without some tribute to the late Mr. Gleeson White, to whose characteristic sympathy and encouragement my book owes much.

FREDERIC WHYTE.

[1] Perhaps I ought to mention that I have reproduced several passages from this article, as also from sundry other contributions to newspapers and periodicals, notably the Indian "Pioneer" and Cassell's "Cabinet Portrait Gallery"; but these passages do not amount, in all, to more than seven or eight pages of the book.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	A Coup d'œil of the Century	1
II.	The Days of the Kembles: The Critics and the Theatres	7
III.	The Days of the Kembles: The Tragedians	17
IV.	The Days of the Kembles: The Comedians	36
V.	Kean and Booth	59
VI.	Macready	76
VII.	Macready's Contemporaries	94
VIII.	The Stage in the 'Fifties	112
IX.	The Stage in the 'Sixties	139
X.	The Era of Irving	163
Appendix I.	Some Recollections of the 'Sixties. By M. Adolphe Beau	189
Appendix II.	"The Bill of the Play" for the Year 1800	194
Appendix III.	Some Additional Illustrations . .	199
Index		201

CORRECTION.

The photograph of Miss Evelyn Millard reproduced at page 164 is by Mr. Alfred Ellis, not Messrs. W. & D. Downey.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

IN COLLOTYPE

TO FACE PAGE

MISS ELLEN TERRY AS "IMOGEN" . . . . . *Frontispiece*
MRS. JORDAN AS "THE COUNTRY GIRL" 38
MISS FANNY KEMBLE 102
MISS ELLEN TERRY 166
MRS. PATRICK CAMPBELL AS "JULIET" 172
MISS ADA REHAN AS "ROSALIND" 174
MISS MARY ANDERSON AS "HERMIONE" 186
MRS. LANGTRY AS "ROSALIND" 186

IN HALF-TONE, ETC.

MRS. SIDDONS AS "LADY MACBETH" 1
JOHN PHILIP KEMBLE AS "CORIOLANUS" 2
EDMUND KEAN AS "RICHARD III." 2
WILLIAM CHARLES MACREADY 4
SAMUEL PHELPS 4
THE BANCROFTS IN "THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL" . . . 6
IRVING AS "MATHIAS" 6

GRIMALDI 12

MRS. SIDDONS AS "JANE SHORE" 18
JOHN PHILIP KEMBLE AS "PENRUDDOCK" 26
CHARLES KEMBLE AS "FAULCONBRIDGE" 30
GEORGE FREDERICK COOKE AS "RICHARD III." 32
CHARLES YOUNG IN "THE STRANGER" 34

JACK JOHNSTONE, JACK BANNISTER, MUNDEN, AND ELLISTON 46
SUETT AS "BAYES" 50
CHARLES MATHEWS THE ELDER 52

EDMUND KEAN AS "SIR GILES OVERREACH" 62

TO FACE PAGE

EDMUND KEAN AS "BRUTUS" 66
JUNIUS BRUTUS BOOTH AS "POSTHUMUS" 74

MACREADY AS "VIRGINIUS" 82
MACREADY AS "MACBETH" 84
STEPHEN KEMBLE AS "FALSTAFF," FAWCETT AS "TOUCHSTONE," MACREADY AS "KING JOHN," AND JAMES WALLACK AS "CHARALOIS" 90

MRS. GLOVER 94
MADAME VESTRIS, MISS MELLON, MISS O'NEILL, AND MISS SMITHSON 98
MISS HELEN FAUCIT. (From the painting by Rudolf Lehmann) 102

MADAME CÉLESTE AS "CYNTHIA" IN "THE FLOWERS OF THE FOREST" 116
SOME EARLY PORTRAITS OF MISS KATE AND MISS ELLEN TERRY 118
MISS KATE TERRY AS "JULIET" 118
MISS KATE TERRY REFLECTED BY MISS ELLEN TERRY . . 118
CHARLES MATHEWS AS "THE MAID OF ALL WORK" . . . 120
A QUARTETTE OF COMEDIANS: MR. JOHN HARE, MR. ARTHUR CECIL, MR. CHARLES MATHEWS, AND MR. HAWTREY. (From caricatures by "Ape" and "Spy" in "Vanity Fair") 122
THE KEELEYS 122
CHARLES KEAN 126
SOME COMEDIANS OF THE 'FIFTIES AND THE 'SIXTIES: BUCKSTONE, T. P. COOKE, CHARLES MATHEWS, BEDFORD AND TOOLE 130
BUCKSTONE AS "SIR ANDREW AGUECHEEK," BANCROFT AS "DR. SPEEDWELL," PHELPS AS "SHYLOCK" AND AS "RICHELIEU" 132
MRS. WARNER 134
A SCENE FROM "TRELAWNY OF THE 'WELLS'" 136
"TWO GENERATIONS": MR. ARTHUR WING PINERO AND DION BOUCICAULT. (From the caricatures by "Spy" in "Vanity Fair") 136
GUSTAVUS V. BROOKE AS "THE DUKE OF GLOUCESTER" . 138

SOME PORTRAITS OF "LITTLE ROBSON" 140
FOUR "HAMLETS": FECHTER, MR. WILSON BARRETT, MR. BEERBOHM-TREE, AND MR. FORBES-ROBERTSON . . . 144

TO FACE PAGE

SOME PORTRAITS OF FECHTER 146
JOSEPH JEFFERSON 148
E. A. SOTHERN 150
SOME COMEDIANS OF THE 'SIXTIES: EMERY, WIDDICOMB, H. COMPTON, AND DION BOUCICAULT 152
EDWIN BOOTH 154
MISS ADELAIDE NEILSON 156
SOME EARLY PORTRAITS OF LADY BANCROFT 158
SCENES FROM "THE VICARAGE" AND "DIPLOMACY" . . . 160
MRS. STIRLING IN "HEN AND CHICKENS," MR. HARE AS "PRINCE PEROVSKY" IN "OURS," LADY BANCROFT AND CLARK IN "OURS," LADY BANCROFT AND MR. ARTHUR CECIL IN "THE VICARAGE" 160
LADY BANCROFT AND MR. ARTHUR CECIL IN "MONEY" . 160
MR. TOOLE IN THE 'SIXTIES 162

MISS EVELYN MILLARD AS "PRINCESS FLAVIA" 164
MISS DOROTHEA BAIRD AS "TRILBY" 164
MR. GEORGE ALEXANDER AND MISS FAY DAVIS IN "THE AMBASSADOR" 164
IRVING AND MISS ELLEN TERRY IN "OLIVIA" 168
MR. CHARLES WYNDHAM AS "DAVID GARRICK" 168
MR. JOHN HARE AS "BENJAMIN GOLDFINCH" 168
MR. WILLARD AS "PROFESSOR GOODWILLIE" 168
MR. EDWARD TERRY AS "DICK PHENYL" 168
MISS ELIZABETH ROBINS IN "THE MASTER-BUILDER" . . 170
MR. CYRIL MAUDE AND MISS WINIFRED EMERY IN "THE LITTLE MINISTER" 170
MISS MARY MOORE 170
MRS. BEERBOHM-TREE 170
MRS. CAMPBELL AND MR. FORBES-ROBERTSON IN "ROMEO AND JULIET" 172
MR. AND MRS. KENDAL IN "DIPLOMACY" 178
MR. AND MRS. BENSON IN "HENRY V." 180
IRVING AS "KING ARTHUR." (From the drawing by Mr. J. Bernard Partridge) 182
IRVING AS "KING LEAR." (From the drawing by Mr. J. Bernard Partridge) 182
MR. BEERBOHM-TREE AS "GRINGOIRE," "FALSTAFF," "SVENGALI," AND "THE VILLAGE PRIEST" 184
SOME ACTOR-MANAGERS: MR. FORBES-ROBERTSON, MR.

TO FACE PAGE

BEERBOHM-TREE, MR. GEORGE ALEXANDER, AND SIR SQUIRE BANCROFT. (From the caricatures by "Spy" in "Vanity Fair") 186

FECHTER AND HIS SON IN "THE MOUNTEBANK"; MR. HENRY NEVILLE AS "BOB BRIERLEY" IN "THE TICKET-OF-LEAVE MAN" 190

ALFRED WIGAN IN "THE ISLE OF ST. TROPEZ" 192

HORACE WIGAN IN "THE CHIMNEY-CORNER" 192

MISS ELLEN TERRY AS "LADY MACBETH". 200

MISS ELLEN TERRY AND MR. GORDON CRAIG IN "THE DEAD HEART" 200

MR. WILLIAM TERRISS 200

MR. WILLIAM GILLETTE 200

A SCENE FROM "LIBERTY HALL": MISS MARION TERRY, MISS MAUD MILLETT, MR. GEORGE ALEXANDER, AND MR. E. M. ROBSON 200

MR. FRED LESLIE AND MISS NELLIE FARREN IN A "GAIETY" BURLESQUE 200

THE "THREE LITTLE MAIDS FROM SCHOOL": MISS EMMIE OWEN, MISS FLORENCE PERRY, AND MISS JESSIE BOND . 200

MRS. PATRICK CAMPBELL AND MR. GEORGE ALEXANDER IN "THE SECOND MRS. TANQUERAY" 200

A SCENE FROM "GUY DOMVILLE": MISS MARION TERRY, MR. GEORGE ALEXANDER, MR. HERBERT WARING, AND MR. W. G. ELLIOT 200

A SCENE FROM "THE SAUCY SALLY": MR. CHARLES HAWTREY, MRS. CALVERT, MISS JESSIE BATEMAN, AND MR. ERNEST HENDRIE 200



MRS. SIDDONS AS "LADY MACBETH."

After the painting by R. Westall.

ACTORS OF THE CENTURY

CHAPTER I

A Coup d'œil of the Century

The history of the English stage during this century might be conveniently divided into six eras: the era of the Kembles, lasting until 1814, when Kean's brilliancy threw them into the shade; the era of Kean, who flashed and flickered for nearly twenty years, and then went out; the era of Macready, whose star, already in the ascendant before Kean's death, shone more and more brightly until 1851; the era of Phelps, a lesser luminary, burning steadily (at Sadler's Wells) until 1862; the era of the Bancrofts, the "Twins" of the theatrical firmament, twinkling merrily (in Robertson's comedies) from 1865 to 1870; and finally, the era of Irving, by whose lustre, displayed for the first time in all its fullness in the following year, these last, though still twinkling as merrily as ever, were so suddenly outshone.

Between the era of the Kembles and the era of Kean there was little essential difference. The two schools of acting were opposed, it is true: the one inclining to the solemn, the stilted, the severe; the other to freedom, unconventionality, extravagance; but the nature of the plays that were produced, and almost all the conditions of the theatrical life of the time, remained the same. It was a time of contrasts and extremes. The leading players were, or were accounted, men and women of genius. The playwrights were most of them mere hacks. Goldsmith and Sheridan had supplied a brilliant interlude of gaiety and wit between two periods of insincere sentiment. The productions of the second period had now given place to a species of brainless farce, of which

O'Keefe (whose one comedy, *Wild Oats*, raises him, however, above the level of his colleagues), Reynolds, Dibdin, Cherry, and Colman were the principal purveyors, and which the last-named, in one of his prologues, thus flippantly attempted to defend:

> "If we give trash, as some few pertlings say,
> Why flocks an audience nightly to our play?"

a defence reduced *ad absurdum* in Leigh Hunt's parody:

> "If there's no merit in six yards of haunch
> Why flocks the town to gaze on Lambert's[1] paunch?"

Drury Lane, as Leigh Hunt goes on to remark in the essay from which the above lines are quoted, was never so completely abandoned to these farces as Covent Garden; but at both theatres they remained in vogue until well into the 'Thirties, relieved by some straggling items from the repertory of the preceding century, by revivals of the masterpieces of Goldsmith and Sheridan, and above all, by those Shakespearean performances on which the fame both of the Kembles and of Kean so largely rests.

The distinction, then, between the two eras is one chiefly of *personnel*. Whereas the strange and striking figure of Edmund Kean stands out before our minds almost alone during the years of his supremacy, the other great actors and actresses of those days seem to group themselves naturally round the stately forms of Mrs. Siddons and John Kemble. Most of them, indeed, belonged to an elder generation. Mrs. Siddons and John Kemble themselves, George Frederick Cooke (Kemble's chief rival in tragedy until 1810), Lewis, the comedian, Jack Bannister and his fair counterpart, the bewitching, mirth-provoking Dora Jordan, had all passed their fortieth year in the first decade of the century, and they all took farewell of the stage shortly before, or soon after, Kean's arrival; Suett and Munden, two others of the band (especial favourites of Charles Lamb's), were respectively the first and the last to go—Suett in 1805, Munden in 1824. Younger than these, but belonging

[1] Daniel Lambert, the famous fat man, on show about this time.



JOHN PHILIP KEMBLE AS "CORIOLANUS."

From the painting (artist unknown) at the South Kensington Museum.



EDMUND KEAN AS "RICHARD III."

From the painting (attributed to John James Halls) at the South Kensington Museum.

to the same period—the period in which Lamb did almost all his playgoing—were handsome Charles Kemble, the best Romeo of his day; the whimsical, delightful, disreputable Elliston; Liston, the creator of Paul Pry, and Charles Mathews, the mimic and entertainer; though the careers of some of them outlasted Kean's. "Master Betty" too, "Young Roscius," the nine weeks' wonder of 1805, belongs (though he lived until 1874) to the era of the Kembles.

"The Kemble School was magnificent and majestic:" says a writer in "Blackwood's Magazine" for 1840, "Kean was his School alone, for it had neither founder nor follower but himself; its spirit was vividness, poignancy, and intensity." Antithesis is apt to involve exaggeration, but there is some truth in this remark. Kean had undoubtedly many imitators, but his style was so individual that it was imitated in vain. He was the supreme type of the actor born—an uncultured, almost uncivilized, poet-player of genius: the last and greatest of that old race of Strollers to which in his young days he had belonged, and which now was being threatened with extinction—the entrance of the railway train the cue for its *Exit*.

Long before Kean's death, Macready had set about fostering that union of the stage with modern art and literature which was to form the salient feature of his career. He had begun, indeed, so far back as 1820, with the production of Sheridan Knowles's *Virginius*, a drama hailed as a masterpiece by almost all the contemporary critics, even Hazlitt and Charles Lamb. By its freshness of language—almost conversational compared with the tragedies until then in fashion—it was thought to inaugurate a new epoch, to herald a "return to Nature." But it was not until 1837—the year of the Queen's accession—that he was able to carry out his policy to the full, and that the friendships he had established with the most prominent writers of the time — Talfourd, Bulwer Lytton, Sir Henry Taylor, Robert Browning—bore fruit in the many famous plays which signalized his periods of management at Drury Lane and Covent Garden.

The era of Phelps might be designated perhaps more fairly

the era of Phelps and Charles Kean, though Kean's career comes off but poorly in any comparison with that of Phelps. Each had the opportunity to show the stuff he was made of when, in 1843, the old theatrical protective system was abolished, and the privilege of acting the plays of Shakespeare (and the serious drama generally), hitherto restricted to Drury Lane and Covent Garden, and to the Haymarket during the summer months, was extended to all the rest. Phelps took the old theatre of Sadler's Wells, for over a hundred years the resort of the roughest pleasure-seekers in London, and made it the home of the Shakespearean drama, opening with *Macbeth*. "While the once great patent theatres," says Mr. H. Barton Baker in his book on "The London Stage," "were handed over to wild beast shows, and were sunk in the deepest slough of degradation, while the fashionable world deserted the drama for the opera, the little remote suburban house—for it was remote in those days from the great centres of London—was nightly filled by an eager and rapt audience, most of them fresh from the workshop, drinking in immortal ideas, of which, but for the stage, they would have lived and died in ignorance." Charles Kean during his nine years' tenancy of the Princess's pursued a very different course. Having none of his father's genius, and being even less qualified by physical gifts for success in Shakespearean *rôles*, he called in all the resources of the stage-carpenter and scene-painter to cover his natural deficiencies. He transformed the old drama, as Mr. Walkley has expressed it, "from an art of rhetoric to an art of spectacle." He is said to have spent as much as £50,000 in a single season. It is not surprising that Macready, who disliked him, and who would naturally look askance at his new-fangled methods, should have gazed more favourably on the more conservative achievements of his steady-going old colleague, Samuel Phelps, at Sadler's Wells. "I believe we must look for the drama, if we really wish to find it," he wrote in 1855 to Sir Frederick Pollock, "in that remote suburb of Islington."

But if the drama was to be seen at its best in Islington, the London of those days was not lacking in theatrical amusements—Italian opera more especially, of which Drury Lane



H. N. King, photo.]

WILLIAM CHARLES MACREADY.



H. N. King, photo.]

SAMUEL PHELPS.

and Covent Garden had become the home. And, if England had no great actors of her own—perhaps it should be admitted that in "Little Robson" she had *one*—there was Ristori, the Siddons of Italy, to illustrate English history with her impersonations of Queen Elizabeth and Mary Queen of Scots; and there was Fechter, the brilliant Frenchman, to interpret Hamlet anew to Shakespeare's countrymen; afterwards came Boucicault from Ireland with his *Colleen Bawn*, and Jefferson from America with *Rip Van Winkle*. And if there were no dramatists of home growth the French drama could be exploited almost unceasingly; the *Pomme Pourrie* of MM. Péché et Bonbon, as Professor Morley called it, could not be served up too often for English tastes. "It would seem," says M. Augustin Filon, in his work "The English Stage," "that there was no getting along without us French between 1850 and 1865. We were translated and adapted in every form. Our melodramas were transplanted bodily; our comedies were coarsened and exaggerated into farces; sometimes even, that nothing should be lost, our operas were ground down into plays. Second-rate pieces were honoured with two or three successive adaptations, and dramas which had lived a brief hour at the Boulevard du Crime in England became classics. There is a tradition that the director of the Princess's had a tame translator under lock and key, who turned French into English without respite, his chain never loosened nor his hunger satisfied until his task, for the time being, should be complete."

The era of the Bancrofts brought with it "The Cup and Saucer Comedy" of T. W. Robertson and his imitators, accompanied by that advent of stage realism which has involved the gradual modification of the whole character of English plays. In *Caste* and *Ours* and *School*, it was to be observed for the first time that the doors in the scene were real doors, opened and shut by real handles. One such innovation led to another, until the little theatre in Tottenham Street—the old Queen's Theatre, rechristened by the Bancrofts the Prince of Wales's—may be said to have exploited the resources of the Tottenham Court Road. Robertson's plays could hardly

have been produced upon the old-fashioned stage, and now the old-fashioned plays became impossible. "Conventions of action and speech," as Mr. William Archer has said, "which passed unnoticed on an empty stage, with three chairs painted on the backing, became intolerable in a setting of absolute reality. Thus, through action and reaction between authorship and stage-management, we gradually developed a totally new ideal . . . of 'holding the mirror up to nature.'"

The era of Irving—how is one to epitomize the era of Irving? How group together achievements and careers so different as Sir Henry's own, and Miss Ellen Terry's, at the Lyceum, Mr. Tree's at the Haymarket and at Her Majesty's, Mr. Wyndham's at the Criterion, Mr. Hare's at the Garrick, Mr. Wilson Barrett's at the Olympic, those of the Kendals, and in succession to them, of Mr. Alexander at the St. James's, of Mr. Toole and Mr. Terry at the theatres called after themselves, and of the dozen other actors and actresses who have become famous during recent years—Miss Mary Anderson, Miss Ada Rehan, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, Mr. Willard, Mr. Forbes Robertson, Mr. Herbert Waring? How class all these together? and with them, all the score of new forms the drama has taken since the sledge bells of the Polish Jew were set jingling in '71?—the comic opera of Gilbert and Sullivan, the topical melodrama at Drury Lane, the Gaiety burlesque, the "musical comedy"; Ibsen and Maeterlinck and "The New Century Theatre"; du Maurier's fairy-tale in four acts and the realistic fantasies of Mr. Bernard Shaw; the problem-play of Mr. Pinero, the staged sermon of Mr. Jones, the midsummer day-dream of Mr. Anthony Hope? An epitome is impossible. "The era of Irving," it must be admitted, is a convenient chronological expression—a pigeonhole for the memory—and nothing more.



Window and Grove, photo.]

THE BANCROFTS IN "THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL."



London Stereoscopic Company, photo.]

IRVING AS "MATHIAS" IN "THE BELLS."

CHAPTER II

The Days of the Kembles: The Critics and the Theatres

To set about compiling a history of the days of the Kembles from the theatrical literature of the period would be soon to find oneself overburdened by an embarrassment of riches. Never before or since has the theatre in England engaged the interest of so many writers—so many great writers among their number. In the criticisms of Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt, dexterously collected and edited by Mr. William Archer and Mr. Robert Lowe, we are furnished with a general impression of the stage during the first three decades of the century. Add to these the essays of Charles Lamb, the "Table Talk" of Samuel Rogers, the *obiter dicta* of Byron and Scott and Moore, Dibdin's "History," Genest's annals, Boaden's biographies, and all the thousand and one volumes of reminiscence and anecdote, and you have an array of authorities before you formidable enough to frighten even a German historian, though he should know himself predestined to the age of Methuselah.

But for our more modest purposes we need make intimate acquaintance with only a few of these—with Thomas Campbell, in his life of Mrs. Siddons; with Macready (whom we shall cultivate for his own sake later), in his fascinating autobiography; with Genest, Boaden, Charles Lamb, Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt; and last but not least, with a later writer, less generally known but in some respects the most informing and most valuable of them all, William Robson, "The Old Playgoer."

Genest's monumental work, "An Account of the British Stage," puts one in mind of an anatomical museum: in it may be found complete reconstructed skeletons—their every limb correctly articulated—of all the successive periods of the

British theatre from 1660 to 1830. Boaden, the biographer of Mrs. Siddons, of John Kemble, and of Mrs. Jordan, was a vain, foolish, ill-natured, pretentious pedant, but he was a lover of the play and wrote from personal knowledge, and his books are therefore of value. With the delightful essays of Charles Lamb—the patron saint of dramatic critics, as he has been happily styled by a distinguished present-day member of that confraternity—all the world is familiar. Hazlitt—the Hazlitt of 1814-20 at any rate—was a glorified hack-journalist, writing indeed at times just to deliver his soul, but more often to keep body and soul together. Hazlitt was an enthusiast for the stage, a perfervid playgoer. "Wherever there is a playhouse," he would exclaim in his frequent expansive moods, "the world will go on not amiss. The Stage not only refines the manners, but it is the best teacher of morals, for it is the truest and most intelligible picture of life." *The Beggar's Opera*, he would declare, had "done more towards putting down the practice of highway robbery than all the gibbets that ever were erected." And again: "There never was a rake who did not become in imagination a reformed man during the representation of the last trying scenes of *The Inconstant*." And yet again: "A good company of comedians, a Theatre Royal judiciously managed, is your true Herald's College, the only Antiquarian Society that is worth a rush." But it is unfair to quote from him only when he gives his hobby its head. These sentences—except, perhaps, the last, in its pith and terseness—give no real idea of Hazlitt, the clear-sighted and appreciative critic, but for whom Edmund Kean, as Mr. Archer says, might have sunk back again into obscurity.

An appreciative critic he may truthfully be called, but not, I think, a sympathetic critic. The gentle Elia, when he tells us of his favourite comedians, infects us with his enjoyment of their humours and eccentricities. This can hardly be said of Hazlitt. Still less could it be said of Leigh Hunt—at all events of the Leigh Hunt of 1805-7. He had not even the surface amiability of Harold Skimpole in "Bleak House"—a character with whom the Leigh Hunt of later years was apt to

be identified. Nobody, indeed, could be more unlike that volatile and engaging individual than the priggish, conceited, censorious, unkindly youth who took up the duties of dramatic critic in 1805. He set himself to his task in the spirit of a stern but conscientious examiner—a prototype of that Head Master of Rugby who was described by one of his youthful victims as a "beast, but a just beast." Even when he did bestow a smile upon one actor, it was apt to be at the expense of another; he had to confiscate Kemble's pedestal in order to find one for Kean.

Talfourd, the author of *Ion* and friend of Macready, has left an interesting comparison of Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt. Of the former, he says that "his dramatic criticisms are more pregnant with fine thoughts on that bright epitome of human life than any other that ever were written; yet they are often more successful in making us forget their immediate subjects than in doing them justice. He began to write with a rich fund of theatrical recollections; and, except when Kean or Miss Stephens or Liston supplied new and decided impulses, he did little more than draw upon this old treasury. The theatre to him was redolent of the past: images of Siddons, of Kemble, of Bannister, of Jordan, thickened the air; imperfect recognitions of a hundred evenings, when mirth or sympathy had loosened the pressure at the heart, and set the springs of life in happier motion, thronged around him, and 'more than echoes talked along the walls.' He loved the theatre for these associations, and for the immediate pleasure which it gave to thousands about him, and the humanizing influence it shed amongst them, and attended it with constancy to the very last; and to those personal feelings and universal sympathies he gave fit expression; but his habits of mind were unsuited to the ordinary duties of the critic. The players put him out."

This is an admirable account of Hazlitt in his later years, when Talfourd knew him best. The eulogy of Leigh Hunt which follows must strike the modern reader as somewhat extravagant: Hazlitt, he says, "could not, like Mr. Leigh Hunt, who gave theatrical criticism a place in modern litera-

ture, apply his graphic powers to a detail of a performance and make it interesting by the delicacy of his touch, encrystal the cobweb intricacies of a plot with the sparkling dew of his own fancy—bid the light plume wave in the fluttering grace of his style—or catch ere she fell the Cynthia of the minute, and fix the airy charm in lasting words."

This praise seems excessive. One may read page after page of Leigh Hunt's criticisms without coming upon a passage to warrant such enthusiasm. Leigh Hunt himself in after years came to a far juster estimate of their merit. "I do not pretend," he says in his "Autobiography," "to think that the criticisms in 'The News' had no merit at all. They showed an acquaintance with the style of Voltaire, Johnson and others; were not unagreeably sprinkled with quotation; and above all, were written with more ease and attention than was customary with newspapers at that time. The pains I took to round a period with nothing in it, or to invent a simile that should appear offhand, would have done honour to better stuff." And he goes on to say that if he thought there was any chance of a survival for the book in which some of these criticisms were reprinted with other theatrical essays of the same period, he "would regret and qualify a good deal of uninformed judgment in it, respecting the art of acting. I particularly erred with respect to comedians like Munden, whose superabundance of humour and expression I confounded with farce and buffoonery. Charles Lamb taught me better."

William Robson, "The Old Playgoer," as he called himself, may also be called (though his one volume of essays did not appear until 1847) "The Old Critic" of his time, as opposed to "The New Critics," Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt. If Kemble had had a pedestal to spare, not with "The Old Playgoer's" sanction should it have gone to Kean! But for all his ferocity against the younger generation, here was a critic who in sympathy was second only to Charles Lamb. I know nothing of his personality—perhaps the truth would not tally with my conception of it; but I picture him as an ideal John Bull—a John Bull, refined and softened by a fine humanity and a love for art, especially for music and the drama. I imagine him

seated at table after dinner, over the walnuts and the wine, holding forth with gusto on his favourite topic—the old actors—to a single congenial listener, the nephew "Charles" to whom his essays, or rather letters, are addressed. Let us listen for a moment to this *laudator temporis acti*, as he defends the drama of his youth against the criticisms of a follower of Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt—the nephew in question. Charles, it seems, has been condemning (a little pedantically) those old plays as having been calculated "neither to improve the race for which they were written, nor to give to posterity an idea of the real manners and customs of their age," and "The Old Playgoer" has cited in refutation the names of Sheridan, Colman, Cumberland, Holcroft, Tobin, and Kenny—"the merry O'Keefe had discontinued writing" before his time. If more could not be claimed for them than that among their productions were many that were "pleasing, affecting, and entertaining,—at least," he cries, "they will not shrink from comparison with these dramatists of yours—mere imitators of the great Elizabethans." *The School for Scandal*, *The Rivals*, *The Duenna*, the iconoclastic Charles has not ventured to disparage. "But what of *Pizarro?*" he is asked "—one of the most efficient plays ever seen upon the stage. . . . *Pizarro* disgusting?—its heroine Elvira a 'soldier's trull'—revolting to good taste?—Good Lord! it little behoves an age wherein the mawkish sentimentality of the mistress of Bill Sikes, the house-breaker, has disgraced every drawing table, to affect horror for Elvira. . . . And Colman's *Mountaineers?*—If you have read 'Don Quixote,' Charles, as he deserves to be read—that is, till you acknowledge it to be the finest fiction in the world—trust me, you would have beheld with pleasure his Cardenio transformed into Kemble's Octavian, his story enlarged by a little interesting love episode and embellished by very pretty music. You know, as you have often heard me declare, that I think the character of Don Quixote approaches nearer to my beau ideal of a gentleman than any I ever met with in print or in life; and I never had two persons more inseparably connected in my mind than Don Quixote and John Kemble. . . . In this character—that

is, Octavian—Kemble's peculiarities, which by some, in other parts, might be thought to militate against him, were absolutely in his favour: melancholy seemed his natural temperament, and the mental alienation of Octavian, which 'was sad by fits, by starts was wild,' fixed his audience in the most intense fascination." . . . Thus he goes on, breaking away continually from his brief to indulge in pleasant memories of the golden age of his youth; and in these digressions he shows the better part of valour, for his brief is a hopeless one: he is defending a lost cause—the plays of his youth were already dead.

In the very beginning of the century London could boast of but five theatres — Drury Lane, Covent Garden, the Haymarket, Her Majesty's (the Italian Opera House), and Sadler's Wells. Of these, Sadler's Wells was the youngest, though as a place of amusement—combining some of the attractions of our present day music halls and the Crystal Palace with those of Hampstead Heath and Epping Forest—it had been a favourite resort since 1683. The theatre was built in 1762. In 1804 Charles Dibdin, the author of "Tom Bowling," undertook the management of it, and under the new title of The Aquatic Theatre it became famous for a series of patriotic nautical dramas which owed their success in about equal measure to the prowess of Nelson and T. P. Cooke. It is strange to look on the old actor's features as photographed half a century later, and to think of him as he must have been in those days—the happy, hearty, careless, harum-scarum sailor—the prototype of so many an Adelphi hero of to-day.

But the fame of Sadler's Wells is still more intimately connected with the name of the great Grimaldi. "Joey" appeared upon its boards for the first time in 1781 at the age of one year eleven months, thereby breaking the record, it may be supposed, of all the "Infant Phenomenons" the world has seen. This was in the character of a sprite. His next notable appearance was in the *rôle* of "Little Clown" at Drury Lane, in his third year—a performance which was thought to entitle him to a weekly salary of 15*s*. The following five years, during which his wonderful talents were



Mr GRIMALDI.
AS HE APPEARED
WHEN HE TOOK HIS FAREWELL BENEFIT
AT DRURY LANE THEATRE ON THE 27th of
JUNE 1828

exploited by his brute of a father both at Sadler's Wells and at Drury Lane, were years of misery. Then his father died, and for three years more he and his mother lived in penury on his small earnings—£1 a week at Drury Lane (Sheridan having raised his salary) and 3*s*. a week at Sadler's Wells, where, during his father's lifetime, he had had 15*s*. But, after this, his prospects brightened, and by 1800 he was a made man. "The Garrick of Pantomime" Mr. Barton Baker calls Grimaldi,[1] and there is some warrant for the title. The famous clown seems to have united in a quite wonderful degree the two gifts of tragedy and comedy so seldom found together. Among the great tragedians Garrick almost alone was a great comedian too. Among comedians how few there have been who could attain to any real height of tragedy!—"Little Robson" for one; Coquelin, perhaps, for another; perhaps, also, Miss Nellie Farren and Yvette Guilbert. Grimaldi, though we think of him as a clown, and though his very name seems to grin at us, could touch or terrify at will: playing the dagger scene from *Macbeth*, in his clown's dress, he would set his whole audience trembling; and when he sang "An Oyster crossed in Love," says Mr. Baker, "such touches of real pathos trembled through its grotesqueness, as he sat in front of the footlights between a cod's head and a huge oyster that opened and shut its shell in time to the music, that all the children were in tears."

"He that does any one thing better than all the rest of the world is a genius," says a writer of the time. "Grimaldi has done this. In his day he was wholly unrivalled. . . . He has left nothing to compare with him on the stage. . . . We rank the genius of Grimaldi with that of Kean."

Drury Lane, the oldest as well as the most famous of London theatres, dates back to the days of Charles II. It was from the stage of the first Drury Lane—Killigrew's theatre, erected in 1663, burnt down in 1762—that Nell Gwynne captivated her royal lover. Rebuilt in 1674 from designs by Wren, its fortunes during the next three decades

[1] In "The London Stage," a most interesting book, to which I am indebted for much of the information given here.

were bound up with the Restoration dramatists—Congreve, Wycherley, Farquhar, Vanbrugh. Here in succession, Betterton, Mrs. Barry, Mrs. Bracegirdle, Colley Cibber, Barton Booth, Nance Oldfield, and Quin won their fame. Then came Garrick's long, unparalleled career from 1746 to 1776, followed by Sheridan's happy-go-lucky management—illumined by his own comedies and the acting of the Kembles—during the last quarter of the century. But to this we shall have to return.

Covent Garden came into existence in 1732 as a successor to an older theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields, then fallen into decay. It was at Covent Garden that Peg Woffington in 1740, fresh from Ireland, dazzled and delighted the town, and that her hardly less famous countrywoman, George Anne Bellamy, made her first appearance in 1744. It was here, too, that what has been called the first pitched battle between Quin and Garrick—between the old school of acting and the new—took place two years later. It was in Rowe's *Fair Penitent* that the battle was fought: "The elder actor was Horatio, Garrick, 'the gallant gay Lothario.' It was a marvellous contrast, the monotonous cadence, the dreary pauses, the sawing of the air, the dignified indifference to the sentiments he was uttering, which marked Quin's style, and the passion, the impulse, the deep intensity of 'little David'; and although the old school had still its adherents, the public verdict was not long in doubt." Until then Covent Garden had its mainstay in pantomime, but now it became a formidable rival to Drury Lane, though Garrick, after the single season, had transferred his allegiance for good and all to the older theatre. Spranger Barry, whose face and voice enabled him to cope with Garrick's genius in such parts as Romeo, and Macklin, the most famous of all impersonators of Shylock, were its principal stars. In 1773 it won a new lustre from *She Stoops to Conquer*. From 1779 to 1785 Henderson, the foremost tragedian after Garrick's death, presided over its fortunes. Between 1785 and 1800 there is nothing in its history that need here be recalled.

The Haymarket Theatre came into existence in 1720, upon the site of an old inn called "The King's Head," and was opened

in December of that year by a company of actors from Paris, styling themselves "The French Comedians of His Grace the Duke of Montague," with a play entitled *La Fille à la Mode, ou le Badaud de Paris*. In 1834 it came under the management of the author of "Tom Jones," whose burlesque *The Tragedy of Tragedies, or The Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great*—a satire upon the drama then in vogue—had been produced here in 1830. It was another of Fielding's burlesques, *The Historical Register*, that by its ridicule of Sir Robert Walpole brought about the passing of the Licensing Act in 1737. Fielding's management came to an end, as a natural consequence, in the same year. Ten years later we find the Haymarket striving to elude the Licensing Act under the management, and by the manœuvres, of the comedian, Samuel Foote, who had just scored a hit at Drury Lane as Bayes in Fielding's most successful piece, *The Rehearsal*. The managers of the "Patent Houses," having successfully called in the intervention of the Westminster magistrate, to put a stop to his first entertainment as being an infringement of their right, he had recourse to various devices for evading the law. Through the medium of "The General Advertiser," he first of all invited "his friends to come and drink a dish of chocolate" with him, and when they came, he proceeded with his entertainment "while the chocolate was getting ready." This was for a morning performance. "The authorities did not again interfere with him," says Mr. Baker, "so he altered the time of his entertainment from morning to evening and the title to 'Tea,' and to drink a dish of tea with Mr. Foote, as going to his theatre came to be styled, was the rage of the season." In 1766 the Duke of York—by way of reparation for a practical joke which cost Foote his leg—interceded with the king and obtained a patent by which the actor was permitted to keep open the Haymarket between May 14th and September 14th, thus constituting it legally a sort of summer substitute for Drury Lane and Covent Garden, which were open only during winter. In 1777 Foote sold his interest to George Colman, under whom (and under his son) the theatre acquired its character as the Home of Comedy, which it has

maintained more or less, with varying degrees of brilliancy, ever since.

The story of the Italian Opera House, as Her Majesty's Theatre was then entitled, is concerned with singers and composers rather than with playwrights and players; yet a few of the names which were conspicuous on its bills must figure also in all histories of the stage—Braham's, for example, and Mrs. Billington's and Miss Kitty Stephens's. Braham, indeed, though "an angel of a singer," Sir Walter Scott tells us, was "a beast of an actor"; but both Mrs. Billington and Miss Stephens (afterwards the Countess of Essex) acted almost as admirably as they sang. I wish I could find room for some of the innumerable tributes to their charms: I must content myself with one—as pretty a compliment, I think, as a woman was ever paid. Mrs. Billington, so runs the tale, was sitting to Sir Joshua Reynolds for a picture of St. Cecilia, when Haydn, the musician, came into the artist's studio. "It is very like, a very fine likeness," he remarked, as he stood opposite the painting, "but there is a strange mistake." "What is that?" asked Sir Joshua hastily. "You have painted her listening to the angels," was the reply, "you ought to have represented the angels listening to her." Is it to be wondered at that Mrs. Billington (in the words of the narrator of the story) "sprang from her seat and threw her fair arms round Haydn's neck"?

CHAPTER III

The Days of the Kembles: The Tragedians

"The homage she has received is greater than that which is paid to queens. The enthusiasm she excited had something idolatrous about it; she was regarded less with admiration than with wonder, as if a being of a superior order had dropped from another sphere, to awe the world with the majesty of her appearance. She raised tragedy to the skies, or brought it down from thence. It was something above nature. We can conceive of nothing grander. She embodied to our imagination the fables of mythology, of the heroic and deified mortals of elder time. She was not less than a goddess, or a prophetess inspired by the gods. . . . She was Tragedy personified." Thus wrote Hazlitt of Mrs. Siddons, and in his dithyramb the feelings of a whole generation found expression; Burke and Campbell and Byron might have collaborated to pen it; even Charles Lamb, whose sense of fun was so apt to trip up his sense of reverence, would have subscribed to it: it was the sincere tribute of an impressionable age to a marvellous personality.

But this was the Siddons of last century—the Siddons who sat to Reynolds as "The Tragic Muse." By 1800 the great actress's power had diminished, and her beauty faded. Her glory was on the wane. The days of her supremacy were over, and her brother, John Philip Kemble, reigned in her place.

There is a curious contrast in the careers of sister and brother, so much alike in their endowments and in their character, and so near each other in age: Mrs. Siddons shone resplendently for a dozen years or so, then gradually less and less; Kemble, at first merely his sister's satellite, rose steadily to pre-eminence. It may be said of him, as it was said with

equal truth of his younger brother Charles, that for thirty years his career was a continuous progress. "Mr. Kemble," wrote a critic in "The New Monthly Magazine" for 1825—two years after the great actor's death—"did not, like his sister, burst upon the town in the full maturity of his powers. He was a gentleman and a scholar, with signal advantages of person, with almost equal defects of voice, who determined to become a noble actor, and who succeeded by infinite perseverance and care, assisted doubtless by the reputation and influence of Mrs. Siddons. He formed a high standard in his own mind, and gradually rose to its level. At his very last, in all characters which were within the scope of his physical capacity, he played his best, and that best seemed absolute perfection. His career, therefore, may be reviewed with that calm and increasing pleasure, with which we contemplate the progressive advances of art; instead of the feverish admiration and disappointment which are alternately excited by the history of those who have played from impulse in the first vigour of youth, and in after days have been compelled languidly to retrace the vestiges of their early genius."

This contrast is doubtless attributable in no small degree to the different ways in which they were brought up. Mrs. Siddons lacked the eight years of restful and wholesome education which stood Kemble in such good stead throughout his life. Let us glance for a moment at her career up to the time of her triumph. She began life as an infant phenomenon; her father, Roger Kemble, was the manager of a travelling company whose status may be inferred from the fact that on one occasion admittance to their performance was contingent on the purchase of packets of tooth-powder. Having fallen in love, undesirably, as it seemed to her parents, with an active member of the band, one William Siddons—an "all-round" actor, capable alike of Hamlet and Harlequin—she was packed off to the house of a Mrs. Greathead at Guy's Cliff, Warwickshire, in the capacity of lady's maid. Here she soon became noted for her accomplishments—her elocutionary powers, more especially, and her skill in sculpture. Such gifts seemed incongruous with her station, and in 1773, at the age



MRS. SIDDONS AS "JANE SHORE."

From the painting by William Hamilton at the South Kensington Museum.

of eighteen, she returned to her parents, secured their (still reluctant) consent to her marriage, and, with her husband, resumed her stage career.

The first event in it of any importance was her meeting at Cheltenham in 1774 with the beautiful Miss Boyle, only daughter of Lord Dungarvan and, as one may call her, a minor poetess. Mrs. Siddons was to appear as Belvidera in a favourite tragedy of those times entitled *Venice Preserved*, and Miss Boyle and her friends made their way to the theatre, expecting to be hugely diverted by the ambitious efforts of what they supposed to be an ordinary third-rate travelling company. Some one told Mrs. Siddons of this, and the young actress went through her *rôle* in a very unenviable frame of mind, anxiously awaiting the expected laughter. And sure enough the fashionable playgoers could be heard tittering and giggling (so she thought) by the middle of the piece. Next day, however, her discomfiture was to be pleasantly dispelled. The sound her naturally suspicious ear had mistaken for merriment was really a series of suppressed sobs! Miss Boyle had come to laugh and had remained to weep. She and her companions had wept so excessively, indeed, that they were quite "unpresentable in the morning and were confined to their rooms with headaches." But as soon as she *was* presentable, the expansive young Irishwoman sought out Mrs. Siddons at her lodgings, made friends with her at once, took upon herself the direction of her wardrobe and enriched it from her own. Ever afterwards she showed the deepest interest in the actress's fortunes and cherished an ardent affection for her till her death.

After several provincial tours with her husband, Mrs. Siddons at last attained the long-wished-for honour of being engaged by Garrick at Drury Lane. Here she made her first appearance in London on December 29th, 1775, as Portia to Garrick's Shylock. But how different was the actual event from that of her dreams and aspirations! Poor Mrs. Siddons! —Imagine her, waking next morning, conscious of failure, to read this notice in the paper:

"On before us tottered rather than walked, a very pretty, delicate fragile-looking creature, dressed in a very unbecoming manner in a

faded salmon-coloured sack and coat, and uncertain whereabouts to fix either her hands or her feet. She spoke in a broken tremulous tone; and at the close of her sentences her words generally lapsed into a horrid whisper, that was absolutely inaudible. After her first exit, the buzzing comment went round the pit generally, she certainly is very pretty, but then how awkward and what a shocking dresser!"

"The Morning Post" was kindlier in its notice of the performance, declaring it "no unpromising presage of her future excellence . . . one of the most respectable first essays we ever saw at either Theatre Royal. . . . Her figure," it went on, "is a very fine one; her features are beautifully expressive; her action is graceful and easy, and her whole deportment that of a gentlewoman." But most of the critics damned her with fainter praise; Walpole's less favourable opinion even of her beauty seems to have been generally shared. "She is a good figure," he says, "handsome enough, though neither nose nor chin according to the Greek standard, beyond which both advance a good deal. Her hair is either red or she has no objection to its being thought so, and had used red powder. . . . Her action is proper, but with little variety, and when without motion, her arms are not genteel."

The "action" of the future "Goddess" was "proper"; the arms of "The Tragic Muse" were "not genteel"! Were ever the first efforts of genius less rapturously received?

A few other *rôles* followed, and then, to the young actress's bitter chagrin, dismissal. "It was a stunning and cruel blow," she say herself in an autobiographical fragment quoted in Campbell's life, "overwhelming all my ambitions, and involving peril even to the subsistence of my helpless babes. It was very near destroying me. My blighted prospects, indeed, produced a state of mind that preyed upon my health, and for a year and a half I was supposed to be hastening to a decline." As a matter of fact, Garrick does not seem to have been much to blame. Sheridan endeavoured to persuade Mrs. Siddons that "Davy" was jealous of her, but that was just Sheridan's blarney to a pretty woman. Her powers were invisible at this time to all but one. The distinction of appraising her at her real value belongs to Henderson, (her second Irish

encourager), who, within a year of her expulsion, declared bravely that she was an actress who had never had an equal nor would ever have a superior. "He was the only great player of this time," says Campbell, "who did her early justice. If we had nothing more than this to inscribe on his tomb, it would be no ignoble epitaph."

In Manchester, in the autumn of this same year, she was more successful. Thence she proceeded to Liverpool, Bath, and Bristol, to return once again to Drury Lane in 1782. Here is her own simple statement of the fact:

"On the 10th of October, 1782, I made my first new appearance at Drury Lane with my own dear beautiful boy, then but eight years old, in Southerne's tragedy of *Isabella*. This character was judiciously recommended to me by my kind friend, Mr. Sheridan, the father of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, who had seen me in that play at Bath. The interest he took in my success was like that of a father."

This time she triumphed. London went mad over her. Drury Lane was so crowded on her nights that the manager of Covent Garden chose them for his weakest bills, confident in an overflow from the neighbouring theatre. Henceforward until the beginning of this century her career was an almost uninterrupted series of successes.

John Kemble's career, prior to his appearance at Drury Lane in 1783, can be condensed into a brief paragraph. Old Roger Kemble was a Catholic, and wished his eldest son to become a priest. With this end in view, he sent him first to Sedgley Park, a Catholic school in Wolverhampton, in 1767, at the age of ten, and then to the English College at Douai, where he remained from 1771 to 1775. Here he gave early evidence of his bent of mind in performances of Brutus and Cato, and in recitations. Finding that his vocation was for the stage rather than for the church, he quitted the college in 1775 and returned to Brecknock, where his parents were performing. His father was displeased and would give him no assistance, so he made shift as best he could for himself. For the next eight years he had the usual ups and downs of the strolling player's life—always in the provinces. Then

came Mrs. Siddons's triumph, and with it the beginning of his own.[1]

I shall not attempt to deal with the careers of Mrs. Siddons and John Kemble from this point onwards. To do so adequately were quite impossible within the space at my disposal, and my object throughout this book will be portraiture rather than biography—portraiture in mosaic, if I may so describe it: a piecing together of brightly-coloured verbal *tesseræ*—bits of luminous criticism, bits of vivid description, significant sayings, illustrative anecdotes: mine, the task merely of selection and arrangement.

But, as I have hinted, the task of selection is one of no little difficulty. Mr. Brander Matthews, in the second volume of the interesting work entitled "Actors and Actresses of Great Britain and the United States," which he has edited in collaboration with Mr. Laurence Hutton, has supplemented his succinct biography of Mrs. Siddons with some scores of carefully chosen extracts from the literature of his subject. I must limit myself to six or seven. Here, to begin with, is a general appreciation and summing up, as it were, from the pen of Thomas Campbell:

"Her lofty beauty, her graceful walk and gesture, and her potent elocution, were endowments which at the first sight marked her supremacy on the stage. But it was not the classical propriety of a speech, nor the grandeur or pathos of a scene; it was no individual or insulated beauty that we exclusively admired. These received their full portion of applause, and to many individuals might seem to exhaust the theme of her praise. But it was the high judgment which watched over all these qualifications, the equally vigilant sympathy which threw itself into the assumed character; it was her sustained understanding of her part, her self-devotion to it, and her abstraction

[1] In 1782, and until 1809, Drury Lane was in the hands of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the most brilliant man of letters and the most shocking man of business with whom the theatre has ever been connected. "Shocking," I think, is the *mot juste*. I cannot here go into the details of his mis-management. Suffice it to say that, in order to get their salaries, actors and actresses employed by him had, at critical moments, to go on strike, even Mrs. Siddons and Kemble themselves being obliged to have resort on occasion to this undignified expedient!

from everything else, and no casual bursts of effect, that riveted the experienced spectator's admiration."

And here, from the pen of Charles Young, a brother tragedian, is a striking picture of her in one of her most noted *rôles*, that of Volumnia in *Coriolanus:*

"I remember her coming down the stage, in 1789, in the triumphal entry of her son, Coriolanus, when her dumb show drew plaudits that shook the building. She came alone, marching and beating time to the music, rolling (if that be not too strong a term to describe her motion) from side to side, swelling with the triumph of her son. Such was the intoxication of joy which flashed from her eyes and lit up her whole face, that the effect was irresistible. She seemed to us to reap all the glory of that procession to herself. I could not take my eyes from her. Coriolanus, banner, and pageant, all went for nothing to me, after she had walked to her place."

Is it what Dr. Johnson would have called a very cynical asperity to wonder whether Coriolanus, in the person of the great John Philip, quite liked it?

Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt shall complete the picture for us. We have seen what Hazlitt has said of her in one of his emotional moments. In his critical moods he was more definite and precise. "Yet she was a pantomime actress," he says, qualifying his account of her awe-inspiring qualities. "Her common recitation was faulty. It was in outbursts of indignation or grief, in sudden exclamations, in apostrophes and inarticulate sounds, that she raised the soul of passion to its height or sunk it in despair." Leigh Hunt, as usual, keeps his head. "Like her brother," he says, "she has a noble countenance, and a figure more dignified than graceful, and she is like him in all his good qualities, but not any of his bad ones." She has "the air of never being the actress; she seems unconscious that there is a noble crowd called a Pit waiting to applaud her, or that there are a dozen fiddlers waiting for her exit." Her weak point is "the amatory pathetic. . . . She can overpower, astonish, afflict, but she cannot win: her majestic commanding features seem to disregard love as a trifle to which they cannot descend." And this stripling of

twenty-two proceeds, with relentless candour, to read her a salutary lesson: "The figure of Mrs. Siddons," he says (in 1806 or 1807—the date of this particular essay is not given in Mr. Archer's edition), "is now too large and too matronly to represent youth, and particularly the immediate passions of youth; we hope that by the next season she will have given up the performance of characters suited neither to her age nor her abilities."[1]

Here, in conclusion, is a picture of her in private life after her retirement from the stage. It is from the "Table Talk" of Samuel Rogers:

"After she left the stage, Mrs. Siddons, from the want of excitement, was never happy. When I was sitting with her of an afternoon she would say, 'Oh dear! this is the time I used to be thinking of going to the theatre; first came the pleasure of dressing for my part, and then the pleasure of acting it; but that is all over now.' When a grand public dinner was given to John Kemble on his quitting the stage, Mrs. Siddons said to me, 'Well, perhaps, in the next world, women will be valued more than they are in this.' She alluded to the comparatively little sensation which had been produced by her own retirement from the boards, and doubtless she was a far greater performer than John Kemble."

Of Mrs. Siddons's personal character conflicting accounts are given. "We cannot remember hearing," says a critic of the time, "that she was ever guilty of a generous action." And more recent writers, Mr. Baker of the number, have gathered together numerous tales illustrative of her hardness, coldness, and lack of charity. But against this must be set, first, the

[1] That Leigh Hunt is somewhat too sweeping in his statement about Mrs. Siddons's failure in the "amatory pathetic" may be deduced from a pleasing account by Campbell of her impersonation of Desdemona during one of her Scotch tours. He had not seen her since his boyhood, and had come to think of her very much as she is here described. At first he did not recognize her in the *rôle*—he had entered the theatre without knowing she was to perform—and he was immensely struck by the "exquisite gracefulness" of the performance, and especially by her "familiar, I had almost said, playful persuasiveness" in pleading for Cassio; and when at last her identity was disclosed to him, he could hardly believe his senses. Surely, he said to himself, this soft sweet creature cannot be Mrs. Siddons!

testimony of her many friends, Thomas Campbell among them, to her good qualities; and secondly, the tendency of green room gossips to invent malicious stories of the kind. Mr. Brander Matthews dismisses them as being no more worthy of credence than the similar charges against Garrick, Rachel, and Charlotte Cushman.

Mr. Baker, on the other hand, has lent his ear to every libel on her fame. His chapters on Mrs. Siddons, indeed, in "Our Old Actors" are so inaccurate and unsympathetic as to spoil an interesting and agreeable book.[1] He depicts her as a solemn, cold-blooded prude, and completely disregards the pleasanter aspects of her character. He ignores, for instance, the many evidences that exist of her sense of fun, being unable to reconcile them with his conception of her. "Fancy awful Sarah Siddons as a comic singer!" he exclaims, in ridicule of Kemble's testimony to her powers in this direction, and goes on, "She did occasionally favour a select circle with 'Billy Taylor,' and must have been about as comic as the *Memento Mori* of an Egyptian feast." It does not occur to him that it may have been very largely in the incongruity between the song and the singer—enjoyed by no one, probably, more than by herself—that the fun consisted.

A good example of her humour is offered by a story she once told Campbell. He gives it practically in her own words. She was vexed (she told him) on her first visit to Scotland by the coldness of her audiences. Their grave attention, but "canny reservation of praise till they were sure she deserved it," wore out her patience. On one occasion, accordingly, she coiled up her powers to the most emphatic

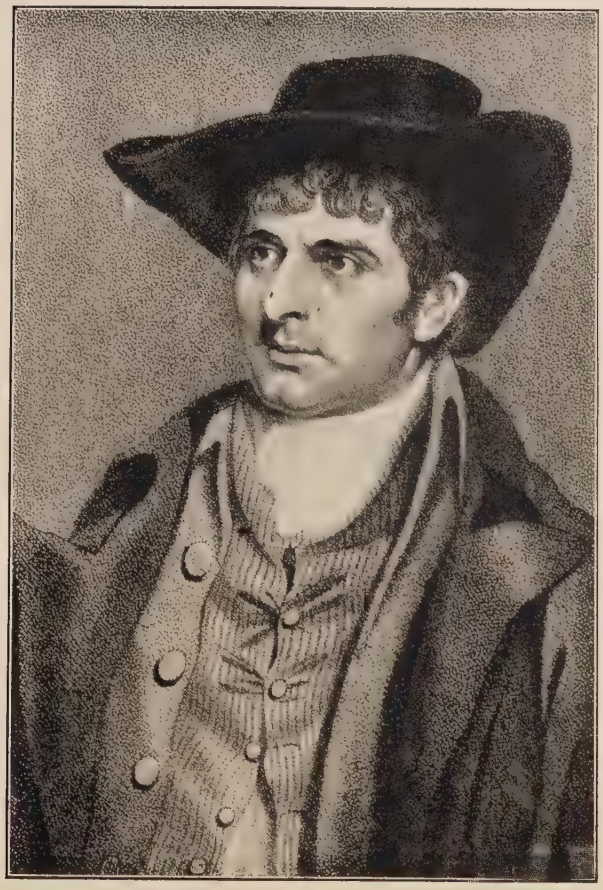
[1] I may give an instance of his inaccuracy. Speaking of her visit to Dublin, he mentions, among other illustrations of her unpopularity there, that she was "at daggers drawn with Daly, the manager, and all the newspapers attacked her." Her visit to the Irish capital, he goes on, was not satisfactory; she hated the place and the people. Mr. Baker does not explain that Daly was an unspeakable scoundrel; that Mrs. Siddons's temporary unpopularity with her audience was due to a misunderstanding afterwards cleared up; that her letters, as her biographer records, were full of her appreciation of the "warm-hearted Irish," and that she afterwards declared her days in Ireland to have been "among the most pleasurable" in her life.

possible utterance of one passage, having previously vowed in her heart that if *this* could not touch them, she would never again cross the Tweed. When it was finished, she paused and looked at her listeners. At last the dead silence was broken only by a single voice exclaiming—"That's no bad!" This ludicrous parsimony of praise convulsed the house with laughter, and then was followed by peal after peal of applause.

"My brother John," Mrs. Siddons said once to Reynolds, the dramatist, "in his most impetuous bursts is always careful to avoid any discomposure of his dress or deportment; but in the whirlwind of passion I lose all thought of such matters." Leigh Hunt, in similar words, draws the same contrast between Kemble and his sister. Stateliness was the chief feature of Kemble's acting. "In the character of Richard," says "The Old Playgoer," "although beneath Cooke and Kean in energy, this did not forsake him; he never was the vulgar stabber; you could never for a moment forget, even in the deepest scenes of his villainy, that he was a prince of the royal house of York, and his object a crown. In the scene with Lady Anne, he wooed as if he were endeavouring to win a lady: Kean, on the contrary, made it a joke between himself and the audience, and would hardly have deceived a cookmaid."

To this I may add what seem to me the two most informing accounts of his acting out of all that I have read. The first is by Charles Lamb:

"No man could better deliver brilliant dialogue—the dialogue of Congreve or of Wycherley—because none understood it half so well as John Kemble. His Valentine in *Love for Love* was, to my recollection, faultless. He flagged sometimes in the intervals of tragic passion; he would slumber over the level parts of an heroic character; his Macbeth has been known to nod. But he always seemed to me to be particularly alive to pointed and witty dialogue. The relaxing levities of tragedy have not been touched by any since him. The playful court-bred spirit in which he condescended to the players in *Hamlet*, the sportive relief which he threw into the darker shades of Richard, disappeared with him. He had his sluggish moods, his torpors, but they were the halting-stones and resting-places of his tragedy—politic savings and fetches of the breath, husbandings of the lungs, where



KEMBLE AS "PENRUDDOCK."

From an old engraving.

of a complexion different from what they themselves would have nature pointed to him to be an economist,—rather, I think, than errors of judgment."

The second is by Sir Walter Scott:

"He seems to me always to play best those characters in which there is a predominating tinge of some over-mastering passion, or acquired habit of acting and speaking, colouring the whole man. The patrician pride of Coriolanus, the stoicism of Brutus and Cato, the rapid and hurried vehemence of Hotspur, mark the class of characters I mean. But he fails where a ready and pliable yielding to the events and passions of life makes what may be termed a more natural personage. Accordingly I think his Macbeth, Lear, and especially his Richard, inferior in spirit and truth. In *Hamlet*, the natural fixed melancholy of the prince places him within Kemble's range; yet many delicate and sudden turns of passion slip through his fingers. He is a lordly vessel, goodly and magnificent when going large before the wind, but wanting the facility to go 'ready about,' so that he is sometimes among the breakers before he can wear ship. Yet we lose in him an excellent critic, an accomplished scholar, and one who graced our forlorn drama with what little it has left of good sense and gentleman-like feeling."

Kemble gave no impulse, was the source of no inspiration, to the writers of his time. "He made up his mind early," says Charles Lamb, "that all the good tragedies which could be written had been written; and he resented any new attempts. His shelves were full. The old standards were scope enough for his ambitions. He ranged in them absolute; and 'fair in Otway, full in Shakespeare shone.'" When he did condescend to appear in a new drama, the result to the author was apt to be disastrous. Sometimes the author took a fierce revenge. "Frogs in a marsh," says Colman in his preface to his play *The Iron Chest*, which Kemble had thus wrecked, "flies in a bottle, wind in a crevice, a preacher in a field, the drone of a bagpipe, all yielded to the soporific monotony of Mr. Kemble." Charles Lamb himself took up the cudgels—perhaps, I should say, took up a rapier—on behalf of his friend Godwin, the author of *Antonio*, produced at Drury Lane in 1801. The essay originally formed part of that on "The Artificial Comedy of Last Century," as printed in "The London Magazine" for 1822, but was afterwards omitted, and is not included in all

editions of Lamb's works. There is the more excuse, therefore, for reproducing some portion of it here. "Great expectations," he begins by telling us, "had been formed. A philosopher's first play was a new era." And then he proceeds with his playful rallying of the great John: "John had the art of diffusing a complacent, equable dullness (which you know not where to quarrel with) over a piece which he did not like"; and with his description of his entry upon the stage: "Antonio, in the person of John Philip Kemble, at length appeared, starched out in a ruff which no one could dispute, and in most irreproachable mustachios. John always dressed most provokingly correct on these occasions."

I wish I had room for the whole of the inimitable passage which follows. I must content myself with the conclusion:

"It would be invidious to pursue the fates of that ill-starred evening. In vain did the plot thicken in the scenes that followed, in vain the dialogue was more passionate and stirring, and the progress of the sentiment point more and more clearly to the arduous development which impended. In vain the action was accelerated, while the acting stood still. From the beginning John had taken his stand—had wound himself up to an even tenour of stately declamation, from which no exigence of dialogue or person could make him swerve for an instant. To dream of his rising with the scene (the common trick of tragedians) was preposterous; for from the outset he had planted himself, as upon a terrace, on an eminence vastly above the audience, and he kept that sublime level to the end. He looked from his throne of elevated sentiment upon the under-world of spectators with a most sovereign and becoming contempt. There was excellent pathos delivered out to them: an they would receive it, so; an they would not receive it, so. There was no offence against decorum in all this; nothing to condemn, to damn: not an irreverent symptom of a sound was to be heard. The procession of verbiage stalked on through four and five acts, no one venturing to predict what would come of it, when, towards the winding up of the latter, Antonio, with an irrelevancy that seemed to stagger Elvira herself—for she had been coolly arguing the point of honour with him—suddenly whips out a poniard and stabs her to the heart. The effect was as if a murder had been committed in cold blood. The whole house rose up in clamorous indignation, demanding justice. The feeling rose far above hisses. I believe at that instant if they could have got him, they would have torn the unfortunate author to pieces. Not that the act was so exorbitant, or

of a complexion different from what they themselves would have applauded upon another occasion in a Brutus or an Appius; but for want of attending to Antonio's *words*, which palpably led to the expectation of no less dire an event, instead of being seduced by his *manner*, which seemed to promise a sleep of a less alarming nature than it was his cue to inflict upon Elvira, they found themselves betrayed into an accomplice-ship of murder, a perfect misprision of parricide, while they dreamed of nothing less."

Of Kemble's private life there is very little to record. His intimacy with Sir Walter Scott is perhaps its most interesting feature. He was able to seduce Sir Walter into deep potations, we are told, at a period when the novelist's other boon companions could no longer boast this praiseworthy achievement. He himself was sometimes to be seen drunk, but, as was said of a still more famous personage, liable to similar falls from virtue, so great was his dignity that when you met him again next morning you blushed at having been a witness of the sight. In later years he was more careful—whether on moral or medicinal grounds seems uncertain, perhaps on both. "He has made a great reformation in his habits," says Scott, writing in 1817, "given up wine, which he used to swallow by pailfuls, and renewed his youth like an eagle."

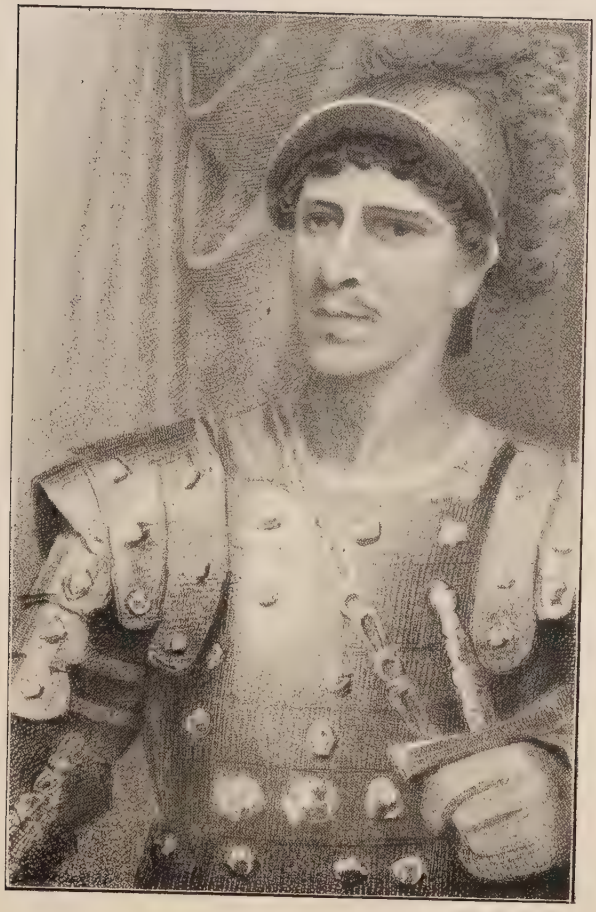
The story of Kemble's marriage is a singularly unromantic one. He is said to have been influenced in the transaction, like Pooh Bah in so many of his, by the offer of a considerable bribe, viz., £4,000; a nobleman, whose daughter had lost her heart to the handsome tragedian, having promised him that sum for thus rendering himself ineligible—a promise left unfulfilled. He reminds one again of Pooh Bah—Pooh Bah relaxing in the company of the Three Little Maids from School—in his demeanour towards his future wife, an actress in his own company at Drury Lane. "Pop," he said to her one evening, chucking her under the chin with playful condescension, "Pop, you may shortly hear something to your advantage." Pop told her mother and wondered ingenuously "what he meant." "Why, he means to make you an offer of marriage, to be sure," replied the more experienced matron, "and you will, of course, accept it." And so it turned out. The wedding was

very quietly celebrated, and Mrs. Bannister—Jack Bannister's wife—asked them home to dinner, after which Kemble took his bride to Drury Lane, where she had to perform as usual, and himself returned to spend the evening with the Bannisters, repairing afterwards to the theatre once again in order to conduct her to her new home in Caroline Street, Bedford Square. "Was ever woman in this humour"—not merely "wooed and won," but wedded!

"I always fancied that the Kembles were like the three Graces," says William Robson, writing of Charles, "they were never so great or so beautiful as when together on the scene. It was a spirit-stirring emulation—Lear, Edgar, Cordelia; Rolla, Alonzo, Elvira; Leontes, Florizel, Hermione; Macbeth, Macduff, and the awful Lady; Wolsey, Cromwell, Katharine; John, Falconbridge, Constance; Pierre, Jaffier, Belvidera. Oh, these were perfect pictures!" Charles was taller and handsomer than John, but except in lovers' *rôles*, Romeo above all, he seems never to have been thought worthy of serious comparison with him. He was, as Macready well expressed it, a first-rate actor in second-rate parts. A good idea of his peculiar talents may be derived, I think, from this account by William Robson.

"I have seen him perform the character of Friar Tuck, in a dramatic version of my old schoolfellow Peacock's *Maid Marian*, with such an extraordinary abandonment and gusto, that you were forced back to the 'jolly green wood and the bonny forest bramble'; he absolutely rollicked through the part as if he had lived all his life with Robin and his men, quaffing fat ale, and devouring venison pasties. But perhaps his masterpiece in this way was Cassio—the insidious creeping of the 'devil' upon his senses, the hilarity of intoxication, the tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth, and the lips glued together; the confusion, the state of loss of self, if I may so term it, when he received the rebuke of Othello; and the wonderful truthfulness of his getting sober, were beyond description fine—nay real. No drunken scene I ever saw on a stage was comparable to it."

Charles had been educated at Douai at John's expense, and had begun life as a clerk at the Post Office, but his handsome face was not born to blush unseen (or, indeed, if green room gossips are to be believed, to blush at all), and he soon drifted



CHARLES KEMBLE AS "FAULCONBRIDGE."

From an old engraving.

to the stage. In private life he seems to have been irresistible—"elegant without affectation, learned without pedantry, witty without rancour, humorous without vulgarity." "I knew the whole dynasty of Kemble," says another witness, "from King John downwards; Charles was the last and the best of the whole stock, beautiful, graceful, gallant, and a very fine gentleman."

It was said of Charles Kemble, as I have mentioned already, that for thirty years his career was a continuous progress. So late as 1835 he still won admiration in his best parts—Hamlet and Mercutio especially. His Hamlet was notable for the qualities that endear and charm. This was the one Shakespearean character in tragedy (over and above Romeo) in which his excellence was universally admitted. "One night," says Westland Marston in "Our Old Actors," "he had been reading at my house some scenes from Richard III. Laying aside the book, he observed in answer to our thanks, 'The fame of my brother John in tragedy caused me for long to avoid trespassing on his ground. To give up Hamlet, however, would have been a sacrifice beyond me.'" From the same work I may quote, in conclusion, the following pleasant passage, descriptive of the actor's personal bearing towards the close of his life:

"In society Mr. Charles Kemble was a model of the gentleman of the old school. His bow, though it might now be called formal, was stately and impressive. His dignity of manner and his tall figure, somewhat massive in his later years, gave him eminently that quality which is called "presence" and which we somehow connect more closely with a bygone period than with our own. It seemed a wrong to Mr. Charles Kemble that he did not off the stage wear knee-breeches, silk stockings and diamond buckles, and that he had survived the time of powdered hair. His conversation was generally grave, but he delighted to hear or relate a good anecdote or story, and on such occasions displayed the hearty enjoyment of humour which had done so much for him as a comedian."

Of Stephen Kemble, Charles's senior by seventeen years, not much need be said. His Falstaff would seem to have been his only notable impersonation, and that chiefly for being

"performed without stuffing"—a feature given special prominence in the advertisements. Personally, he appears to have been a genial soul, and there is something that convinces in this cordial tribute to his social qualities—extracted from a notice of his career in Oxberry's "Dramatic Biography": "It is melancholy to think that those piercing black eyes of Stephen's are now closed in death, and that the laughter-loving Kemble will gibe no more. He was the only approachable man of that family: we were always afraid of John Kemble. Mrs. Siddons, too, was awful. . . . Even Charles, gentle Charles, had a disdainful look, a scornful brow, and his affability always bore the look of condescension; but Stephen was a whimsical, merry gentleman. . . . He was a man of information, too, and a more learned and entertaining companion than is generally met with in a green room."

The first theatrical event of any importance recorded by Genest in 1800 is the London *début* of George Frederick Cooke. Washington Irving gives a striking picture of Cooke in his "Sketch Book":

"The finest group I ever saw was at Covent Garden, when Cooke, after a long disgrace for his intemperance, reappeared on the boards to play Iago to John Kemble's Othello. Mrs. Siddons played Desdemona, and Charles Kemble Cassio beautifully. Kemble had sent for Cooke to rehearse, at his room, but Cooke would not go. 'Let Black Jack,' so he called Kemble, 'come to me.' So they went on the boards without previous rehearsal. In the scene in which Iago instils his suspicions, Cooke grasped Kemble's left hand with his own, and then fixed his right like a claw on his shoulder. In this position, drawing himself up to him with his short arm, he breathed his poisonous whispers. Kemble coiled and twisted his hands, writhing to get away, his right clasping his brow, and darting his eye back on Iago. It was wonderful."

Here is another from the pen of Sir Walter Scott:

"I saw Kemble play Sir Giles Overreach (the Richard III. of middling life) last night; but he came not within a hundred miles of Cooke, whose terrible visage and short, abrupt and savage utterance, gave a reality almost to that extraordinary scene in which he boasts



GEORGE FREDERICK COOKE AS "RICHARD III."

From an engraving after the picture by C. R. Leslie.

of his own successful villainy to a nobleman of worth and honour, of whose alliance he is ambitious. Cooke somehow contrived to impress upon the audience the idea of such a monster of enormity as had learnt to pique himself even upon his own atrocious character. But Kemble was too handsome, too plausible, and too smooth."

One more description, this time by a brother actor, Charles Mathews, will render our impression of him still more distinct:

"His figure and face are much more adapted to the villain than the lover. His countenance, particularly when dressed for Richard, is somewhat like Kemble's, the nose and chin being very prominent features, but the face is not so long. He has a finely-marked eye, and upon the whole, I think, a very fine face. . . . The most striking fault in his figure is his arms, which are remarkably short and ill-proportioned to the rest of his body, and in his walk this gives him a very ungraceful appearance. He is one of the most intelligent men and agreeable companions I ever met with.

Mathews's testimony to Cooke's social qualities is borne out by many other writers, Macready among the number; yet he was normally a drunkard and a reprobate. "One week the scholarly and thoughtful gentleman," says Mr. Laurence Hutton, "the next a maniac and a sot"—but this week came oftener!

Cooke was the first great English actor to cross the Atlantic. His ship having been inadequately provided with stimulants, the voyage was beneficial to his health—so much so that his appearance on arrival provoked doubts as to his identity. Doubts easily and speedily dispelled! The maniac week soon came round, and with it an exhibition of the actor's singular talent for epigrammatic insult. "Apology from me!" he had once yelled at a Liverpool audience, when called upon to make amends for some unusually disgraceful conduct upon the stage; "from George Frederick Cooke! Take it from this remark: there 's not a brick in your infernal town which is not cemented by the blood of a slave"—as vigorous a home-thrust as was ever, perhaps, delivered. His initial amenity in America was conceived in the same spirit. It was addressed to a descendant of one of the first settlers in Maryland. "Have you kept the family jewels?" Cooke inquired—"*the chains and handcuffs*, I mean." An invitation to act before the President he

answered in lighter vein. What! He, George Frederick Cooke, act before the President! It was bad enough to have to play before rebels at all. He was certainly not going to play before the contemptible king of the Yankee-doodles.

Charles Mayne Young was in every way Cooke's opposite. His style was modelled, indeed, on that of Kemble. "The elegance of Young's attitudes at one period delighted us," says a writer in Oxberry's "Dramatic Biography," "the harmony of his voice charmed us, and the correctness of his delineations procured our respect, but he never excited us—all our emotions were those of placid pleasure. At his worst he never offended us—at his best he only pleased us. . . . Mr. Young never gives himself up to his feelings, but always relies upon his judgment—he never acts from the heart, but the head. That he is an imitator of Kemble he has himself admitted; and we conceive that he has seized upon the worst peculiarities of that performer. He has his stiffness without his dignity—his pedantry without his propriety—his external coldness without his internal feeling—he is loud where Kemble was impressive—heavy where his master was pathetic—and only pleasing where the other was electric."

Young was educated at Eton and at Merchant Taylors', and on leaving school was put by his father, an eminent surgeon, into a city office. At the age of twenty-one, however, he decided to go upon the stage, and accordingly made his *début* at Liverpool in *Douglas* in 1798, with great success. His theatrical life was one direct line of smooth sailing. "A studious upright man," he is described, "very generally esteemed. He moves in the first circles, and is completely a drawing-room beau. He touches the piano with taste, and sings interestingly. He is, besides, partial to field sports, and, like Lord Chesterfield, rides beyond price."

"The most extraordinary circumstance which occurs in the whole history of the stage." Thus it is that Genest describes the first appearance in London (December, 1804) of "Master Betty"—William Henry West Betty, to give him his full name.



CHARLES YOUNG IN "THE STRANGER."

It fell to the lot of Charles Kemble to usher him in at Drury Lane—Betty had previously appeared for a few nights at Covent Garden—with an elaborate rhymed address—a task he must have undertaken with a wry countenance :

> "A youth your favour courts whose early prime
> Derides the tedious growth of lingering time."

So it ran, and the favour of the public was not courted in vain. Throughout the season "Young Roscius," as he came to be known, was the rage. The House of Commons, on one occasion, adjourned its sitting that its members might be present at his performance of Hamlet. Mrs. Siddons and Mrs. Inchbald, the prolific playwright of those days, were among the few women who were not carried away. A very pretty and very clever boy, was their verdict, but nothing more. Some of the critics—Leigh Hunt at their head—were less appreciative still, and the bubble soon burst. In after years Hunt thus referred to the part he had taken in the matter—the passage may be regarded as a sort of epitaph on Master Betty's strange career :

> "I wish with all my heart we had let him alone and he had got a little more money. However, he obtained enough to create him a provision for life. His position, which appeared so brilliant at first, had a remarkable cruelty in it. Most men begin life with struggles, and have their vanity sufficiently knocked about the head and shoulders to make their kinder fortunes the more welcome. Mr. Betty had his sugar first and his physic afterwards. He began life with a double childhood, with a new and extraordinary felicity added to the natural enjoyments of his age; and he lived to see it come speedily to nothing, and to be taken for an ordinary person. I am told he acquiesces in his fate, and agrees that half the town were mistaken. If so, he is no ordinary person still, and has as much right to our respect for his good sense as he is declared on all hands to deserve it for his amiableness."

"Young Roscius" made his final appearance as a boy-actor in March, 1808, after two or three years' successful touring in the provinces. Then he went to Cambridge. In 1812 he reappeared upon the stage, and acted until 1824, when he left it for good and all. He lived until 1874.

CHAPTER IV

The Days of the Kembles: The Comedians

It may be doubted whether we should have much appreciation nowadays for the histrionic methods of the Kembles. We should detect a touch of the absurd, probably, in Mrs. Siddons's sublimest efforts, and blush for her sympathetically; the great John Philip, I imagine, we simply could not stand.

With the comedians, were they to reappear upon our modern stage, it would, I think, fare better—at any rate, with Jack Bannister, Dora Jordan, and Robert William Elliston. These I am sure we could stand—delight in even, only less heartily than "The Old Playgoer" and Charles Lamb themselves. In Jack Bannister, indeed, we do actually delight, for, as Uncle Toby in Leslie's picture at the National Gallery, is he not still acting for us—his personality unaltered, intensified rather, in being thus blended with one still richer and more lovable? "A finer association never took place," wrote "The Old Playgoer" more than fifty years ago, "than when Bannister sat for the picture of Uncle Toby looking in the Widow Wadman's eye. When I first heard the circumstances, all the feelings of the thing rushed upon me, the friend who conceived the idea, the artist who executed it, were absolutely objects of my envy! Uncle Toby! Jack Bannister! There was never a finer association!"

Let us hear "The Old Playgoer" out. Jack Bannister is his favourite comedian, and his enthusiasm is pleasant to listen to: "As I cannot think Mrs. Jordan could have played an ill-natured character," he says, "so I cannot fancy Bannister in a mean or sneaking one: his tall, full, though not corpulent person, his handsome face, full bright eyes and fine mouth could never be brought to it." Bannister pleased him especially in his sailor *rôles*. "During the whole or nearly the whole of

his career, we were engaged in war, and principally that part of it in which our naval heroes took precedence: no wonder then that their representatives were always welcome on the stage; and of these, Bannister was the very king, or perhaps I should say admiral. I cannot help suspecting that his nautical personations were, like the songs of the great Dibdin, a *little* imaginative, hardly savouring enough of *pitch*, and had a trifle too much of the milk of human kindness in them. But what then? They—both songs and characters—made a grateful nation love Jack Tar the better." But it was in acting of a somewhat higher kind that the actor was seen at his best: "Though he ranged through old comedy, modern comedy, farce and burletta—though he played, and played well, the Mercutios, Touchstones, Feignwells, Sir Bashfuls, Scrubs, Trappantis, and many other equally good parts—he never produced so much effect as in the character of Walter, in a little piece written upon the old ballad of 'The Children in the Wood,' which remains almost as sacred to him as Penruddock does to Kemble. No actor ever displayed richer pathos than he did in this exquisite little bit."

Bannister, like so many admirable comedians of our own day—like Sir Squire Bancroft and Mr. Wyndham, for instance, Mr. Hawtrey and Mr. Hare—was to be seen for the most part in characters made to measure. All that he had to do in them was to exploit the rich resources of his own personality. Actors of this stamp change their *rôles* much as a pretty woman does her dresses, each but exhibiting his peculiar talents, as she her beauty, in new lights and new aspects.

"Bannister," says Thomas Campbell, "was certainly not the chief of convulsively droll actors: but he was to my taste something better—one who made you forget that you were looking at a play. He was pure hilarity and plain English nature. Without a trait of grimace on his comely countenance, he always came in as if he had been breathing the fresh air of the country; and he was more than an actor, by seeming to be no actor at all, but a gloriously pleasant fellow, helping you to enjoy a joke." Hazlitt's account of him conveys a very similar idea. "Gaiety, good humour, cordial feeling, and

natural spirits," he tells us, "shone through his characters and lighted them up like a transparency. Bannister did not go out of himself to take possession of his part, but put it on over his ordinary dress, like a *surtout*, snug, warm, and comfortable. He let his personal character appear through; and it was one great charm of his acting. . . . Most of his characters were exactly fitted for him—for his good-humoured smile, his buoyant activity, his kind heart, and his honest face; and no one else could do them so well, because no one else could play Jack Bannister."

The son of an actor and vocalist of some position, Bannister had begun life as a student at the Royal Academy, and he counted some of the greatest artists of his time among his most intimate associates—among others, Gainsborough, Morland, and Rowlandson, the caricaturist. Here is what Leslie has to say of him in his "Autobiography":

"Bannister was remarkably handsome, even as an old man; his dark eyes, still full of animation, were more striking from the contrast with his white hair. His nature was a thoroughly genial one; 'When I first attracted notice on the stage,' he said, 'I was told of such and such people who were my enemies, but I never would listen to such reports, for I was determined to go through life without enemies; and I *have* done so.' He said to Constable, 'They say it is my wife who has taken care of my money, and made me comfortable in my old age; and so she has; but I think I deserve a little of the credit, for I *let* her."

And here, to complete our impression of him, is a facetious sally by one of his boon companions:

"With seventy years upon his back
Still is my honest friend Young Jack;
Nor spirits checked, nor fancy slacked,
But fresh as any daisy.
Though Time has knocked his stumps about
He cannot bowl his temper out,
And all the Bannister is stout
Although the steps are crazy."

Mrs. Jordan, whose name is always coupled with Jack

MRS. JORDAN AS THE "COUNTRY GIRL."

From an engraving by John Ogborne, after the painting by George Romney.



Bannister's by reason of the similarity of their gifts, was almost as supreme in comedy as Mrs. Siddons was in tragedy, and for almost as long; from 1785, when she first appeared at Drury Lane, as Miss Peggy in *The Country Girl*, until her last appearance, as Lady Teazle, at Covent Garden in 1814.

Her mother was a Miss Grace Phillips, daughter of a Welsh clergyman. As to the identity and status of her father, theatrical historians have hitherto disagreed. Mr. Joseph Knight, in the "Dictionary of National Biography," refers to him as "a Captain Bland," whom Miss Phillips "captivated" when she was acting at Smock Alley, Dublin, and "is said to have married"; but he qualifies these statements by the remarks that they "have grave inherent improbability," and that there "is reason to suppose that Bland was a mere stage underling." Mr. Archer also seems to have been baffled by the conflicting evidence. "Her father, Mr. Bland," he tells us, "is said to have been an Englishman of good family."[1] As a matter of fact, Bland belonged to a well-known Irish family. His father, Mr. Bland of Derriquin Castle, Co. Kerry, was a Judge of the Prerogative Court, Dublin, and in his youth had fought at Dettingen as a cornet of "Bland's Horse," now the Third Hussars. It was while quartered in Wales that Captain Francis Bland—to give him his full name—met Grace Phillips. They were married in Ireland, and in a Catholic church. The ceremony was an illegal one, as they were both Protestants, and some years later Bland, under pressure, it is said, from his family, but in any case to his own shame, availed himself of this loophole for escape and abandoned her. She seems to have thriven but ill as an actress, and hopes she had built on her eldest daughter were shattered by an unsuccessful *début*. It fell to Dora, her second, to retrieve the family fortunes. Her first appearance in Dublin, as Phœbe in *As You Like It*, was quite a triumph, and led to her immediate engagement by Tate Wilkinson, one of the most enterprising provincial managers of those days, for his travelling company, playing on the "York circuit." It was

[1] In his sketch of her career in "Actors and Actresses of Great Britain and the United States."

he who gave her the name by which she is known. She had expressed a wish to drop the name of Bland and to pass for a married woman. "Very well, my dear," said the old manager whimsically, "you have crossed the water, so we'll call you Mrs. Jordan." Three years later she appeared at Drury Lane; and here, as Peggy in *The Country Wife*, as Viola in *Twelfth Night*, as Sir Harry Wildair—Peg Woffington's most popular *rôle*—in *The Constant Couple*, and as Celia in *The Greek Slave*, among other characters, she won the hearts of all London in general, and of the Duke of Clarence in particular.

Her connubial relations with the duke began in 1790, lasted for twenty years, and resulted in a family of ten children. Some of her descendants now sit in the House of Lords; one of them, by the irony of fate, stands in no very distant succession to that throne whose shadow severed her from her royal lover. Into the sad particulars of this severance I need not enter. It is enough to say that her last years were full of trouble, and that she died at St. Cloud (where she had been living in penury) of a broken heart.

A face of irresistible charm, an entrancingly beautiful figure, a voice, quotes "The Old Playgoer," that

> ". . came o'er the ear like the Sweet South
> That had breathed upon a bank of violets,"

and a laugh whose "contagious power," says Macready, "would have broken down the conventional serenity of Lord Chesterfield himself": these would seem to have been the secrets of Mrs. Jordan's popularity. "She was an actress," says Mr. Archer, summing up the evidence of all her contemporary admirers, "supremely endowed with the *Ewig-Weibliche*, and irresistible in all parts in which a lavish, genial, vivid femininity was essential or at least admirable. Where the woman required either exaltation into the heroine or repression into the fine lady she was ill at ease. Her critics, it is clear, were all more or less in love with her; and in that fact we can read in epitome the wealth of her endowment and the limitations of her art."

She seems to have been keenly alive herself to these limitations, to judge by a remark she made once to a friend who had expressed surprise at some vagary of the "public taste." "Oh, don't mention public taste," she exclaimed, "for if the public had any taste, how could they bear me in the part I play to-night, and which is far above my habits and pretensions?" The part in question was that of Rosalind, and the tasteless public was in full agreement with Campbell and Leigh Hunt! "Here alone, I believe," says Campbell, "in her whole professional career, Mrs. Siddons found a rival who beat her out of a single character. The rival Rosalind was Mrs. Jordan." Was she conscious, I wonder, that she was "giving away" her most distinguished admirers?

By implication—for Viola requires at least as high a talent as Rosalind—Mrs. Jordan discounted at the same time this exquisite passage from Charles Lamb:

"Those who have only seen Mrs. Jordan within the last ten or fifteen years can have no adequate notion of her performances of such parts as Ophelia, Helena in *All's Well that Ends Well*, and Viola in this play. Her voice had latterly acquired a coarseness which suited well enough with her Nells and hoydens, but in those days it sank, with her steady melting eye, into the heart. Her joyous parts—in which her memory now chiefly lives—in her youth were outdone by her plaintive ones. There is no giving an account of how she delivered the disguised story of her love for Orsino. It was no set speech that she had foreseen, so as to weave it into an harmonious period, line necessarily following line, to make up the music; yet I have heard it so spoken, or rather *read*, not without its grace and beauty; but when she had declared her sister's history to be a 'blank,' and that she 'never told her love,' there was a pause, as if the story had ended; and then the image of the 'worm in the bud' came up as a new suggestion, and the heightened image of 'Patience' still followed after that, as by some growing (and not mechanical) process; thought springing up after thought, I would almost say, as they were watered by her tears. So in those fine lines:

> 'Write legal cantos of contemned love—
> Holloa your name to the reverberate hills—'

there was no preparation made in the foregoing image for that which was to follow. She used no rhetoric in her passion; or it was nature's

own rhetoric, most legitimate then, when it seemed altogether without rule or law."

"The Old Playgoer," too, defends her indirectly against herself. He has been speaking of the conjunction of the gifts of tragedy and comedy:

"The two powers have rarely been so beautifully combined as in her; and yet her tragedy was not tragedy; she was not a heroine with royal sorrows, but she was a woman, with woman's sympathies and woman's affections; and hearts that were proof against the lofty powers of the higher muse would melt into willing, sweet pity or love at her thrilling tones and delicious enunciation. Delicious! Why, her common speech had more sweetness in it than any other woman's singing! Siddons, Mrs. Abington, Miss Farren, Mrs. Pope, Miss O'Neill, all possessed talents that she perhaps had no pretensions to; but never did I hear a human voice that so completely expressed the word melody as that of Dora Jordan. Rich, round, full, clear, and yet so soft! I know the simile is stale, but to nothing can I compare it but the full notes of the nightingale, when May's moons are brightest and her young flowers sweetest."

It was in comedy that she appealed to Hazlitt. Here are half-a-dozen characteristic sentences from his different accounts of her: "It was not as an actress, but as herself, that she charmed everyone. . . . Nature had formed her in her most prodigal humour. . . . She was all gaiety, openness, and good nature. . . . Her person was large, soft, and generous, like her soul. . . . Her voice was a cordial to the heart, rich, full, like the luscious juice of the rich grape. . . . She rioted in her fine animal spirits and gave more pleasure than any other actress, because she had the greatest spirit of enjoyment in herself. . . . She was Cleopatra turned into an oyster wench!"

Leigh Hunt measures out his appreciation less freely and with more precision. Her "immediate felicity," he says, in his somewhat finicking way, was, as with Bannister, heartiness—"but as the matter of this feeling becomes softened in a female, it becomes a charming openness mingled with the most artless vivacity"; her chief lack was the ability to impersonate a "lady"—a natural result of so frequently playing breeches-parts. In her younger days she had been the

most natural actress of childhood, but—let Leigh Hunt himself develop the "but"! "To be very fat, and to look forty years old, is certainly not the happiest combination for a girlish appearance, and Mrs. Jordan, with much good sense, seems to have almost laid aside her romps and her Little Pickles for younger performers."

It is hard to tell whether Mrs. Jordan was *ever* as delightful off the stage as she was on; *normally*, it seems certain that she was not: the conversation of the Duke of Clarence was, perhaps, hardly calculated to stimulate her social powers. Nor was she likely to shine, one imagines, in the company of her bumptious biographer; but here, for what it may be worth, is his answer to the question:

"There was a heartiness in her enjoyment, a sincerity in her laugh, that sunk the actress in the woman: she seemed only to exhibit herself and her own wild fancies, and utter the impromptus of the moment. The reader will perhaps ask here, whether this was at all borne out by the fact; and whether Mrs. Jordan's natural character any way resembled the stage impression of her? The answer, *so far as I had means to estimate her is*—Not in the least."

Boaden prints the last four words in capitals; I prefer to put the emphasis on the preceding ten.

The career of Harriet Mellon presents at once a curious likeness and a curious contrast to that of Mrs. Jordan. To begin with, she also was the offspring of a dubious marriage. A Lieutenant Mathew Mellon, of the Madras Native Infantry, an Irishman, doubtless, from his name, is supposed to have been her father. Her mother, a native of Cork, of peasant origin, but earning her livelihood as a shop girl and as wardrobe-keeper to an Irish theatrical company, claimed to have been married to him on Boxing Day, 1777. If he ever existed, and was in fact her husband, he deserted her and disappeared into space. Harriet was born in November, 1777, and went early on the stage. Sheridan discovered her at Stafford, and invited her to visit him at Drury Lane. The story of their interview is pleasantly told by her biographer,

Mrs. Wilson. Wishing for a specimen of her declamation, Sheridan requested her, it appears, to read aloud the scenes of Lydia Languish and Mrs. Malaprop from his own play, *The Rivals:* "She felt greatly agitated, and answered with the *naïve* unaffected manner which she claimed through life. 'I dare not, sir, for my life! I would rather read it to all England. Suppose, sir, you did me the honour of reading it to me?' There was something so unassuming and childlike in the way she made the daring request that the manager entered into the oddity of the matter, and read nearly the whole play to his delighted young auditor. She became so identified with the drama that she forgot all dread of the author, and on his request she read the scenes of Lydia and her aunt with so much spirit that Mr. Sheridan applauded repeatedly, and told her she could play either character, and gave her an engagement."

Accordingly, she made her first appearance at Drury Lane as Lydia Languish in January, 1795, but not with the success this incident seemed to promise. Subsequent performances raised the general opinion of her talents, and her charms of face and voice soon won her the admiration of the town.

It is not so much by her success on the stage, however, as by her success in the marriage market that she is famous. "As an actress she came in the second line," says Mr. Knight, "being eclipsed by Mrs. Jordan": as a wife she may be said to have taken a Double First. She had been just twenty years on the stage, and had passed her thirty-eighth birthday, when, in 1815, she married Thomas Coutts, the wealthiest banker in London, then nearly eighty. He died in 1822, leaving her all his money. Five years later she married William Aubrey de Vere, ninth Duke of St. Albans. She made Sir Walter Scott her confidant in the matter of the duke's courtship, on an occasion when they both were his guests at Abbotsford. She had refused him twice, she said, and decidedly: he was merely on the footing of friendship. "I urged it was akin to love," proceeds the romantic Sir Walter. "She allowed she might marry the duke, only she had at present not the least intention that way."

Scott was a good friend to her. It was the fashion, as he goes on to say in this passage from which I have quoted, to attend her parties and to abuse her. She was thought ostentatious. Even her fellow guests at Abbotsford, including several ladies of high rank, gave her the cold shoulder until Sir Walter himself, beginning with the youngest and prettiest of them, taught them better manners. To him, only her good qualities were visible—her simplicity, her gaiety, her kindliness, her readiness to do good.

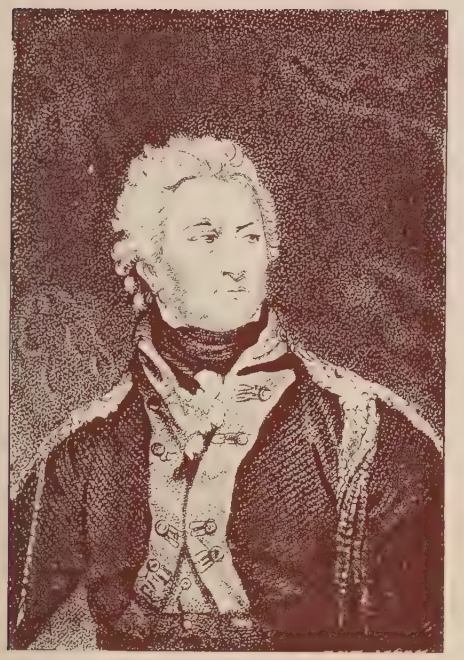
A millionaire's money-bags, a ducal coronet, and the fatherly affection of a noble-minded man of genius—these were rich prizes for the granddaughter of a poor Irish peasant!

One of the things that strike you most in turning over the pages of Genest is the frequency with which Irish names—mostly of an extravagantly comic description—are to be found in the lists of *dramatis personæ*. In one place Genest draws attention to this himself, quoting from Dutton, an earlier student of the theatre, in explanation of the phenomenon. "Sligo," says Dutton, alluding to an Irish character, who plays a leading part in an opera entitled *The Blind Girl*, the scene of which is laid in Peru, "is such a character as is nowhere to be seen but upon the stage. This species of dramatic monsters owes its birth in a great measure to the present preposterous system which our modern dramatic writers have adopted, of drawing their characters with an eye to particular and individual performers. Instead of leaving the actor to qualify himself for the part, they qualify the part for the actor. Because Johnstone has deservedly acquired great celebrity by his apt personation of Irish characters they must needs lug an Irishman into the list of the *dramatis personæ* without giving themselves the trouble to reflect whether it can be done with propriety or not—whether the part assimilates with the rest of the characters and with the general tenour of the piece."

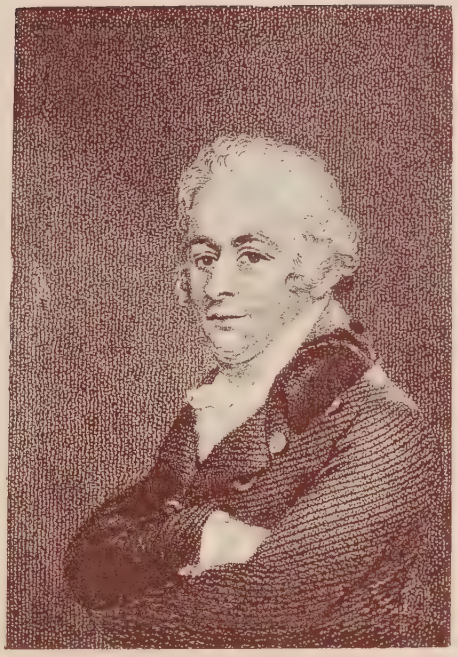
One of the very best of "The Old Playgoer's" descriptions is that of "Irish Johnstone," as he was called—he seems to have been a blend of Mr. Leonard Boyne, Mr. J. D. Beveridge,

and Mr. Denis O'Sullivan, who acted (as well as sang) so admirably in the title-*rôle* of *Shamus O'Brien*.

"The land of fun, feeling and melody," says Robson, "never had so faithful, so genuine a representative. . . . From Teague in a blanket, or a skewered coat, to the refined Irish gentleman, who is fit society for princes, he was real—actual. His perception of character and the necessary shades of his brogue were astonishing. Hear him on one night cracking his rather rough jokes on Ould Modther Brulgruddery in the broad but natural *patois* of a real Emeralder, and then, to-morrow, see him wearing a military uniform as if he were used to it, his figure drawn up as if accustomed to the parade, and his brogue so delicate, so fine, so scarcely perceptible, that you would declare the gentleman and the soldier merely retained it to give music to his discourse, and to add power to the insinuation of the Irishman's all-persuasive tongue. . . . There is no character so full of human animal spirits, and indeed of wit, as a real Irishman, and yet how rarely do we see a good personation of one brought upon the scene. We have Scotchmen, Dutchmen, Welshmen, Frenchmen at command, but directly a man attempts to speak the Irish brogue he becomes coarse and blackguardly. Such was not Jack Johnstone: if the character was coarse, his style of humour softened down and took off its asperities; if it was exalted or pathetic, it lost nothing in his hands, and, strange to say for an Irishman, he said no more than was set down for him. . . . As if Nature had meant him to be the organ to diffuse his country's beautiful music, she had given him one of the most beautiful voices ever heard, particularly in its falsetto; and indeed, previously to the appearance of Incledon, he not only played Irish characters but took the lead in English opera and burletta. It was not, in fact, until after his secession from the opera that his great merit as a comedian became fully known. Oh, how sweetly he would warble "The Boys of Kilkenny" and many other beautiful Irish airs! Nay, I have almost fancied some of his comic songs weakened by the melting tones in which they were sung: the words were intended to make you laugh, the air inclined you more to delicious tears. And then he could wheedle and throw in his soft expletives! You knew all that is said of irresistible Irishmen to be plain, clear matter of fact, when you saw Johnstone make love. . . . His face was animated, his eye eloquent, his smile fascinating, his person tall and good, and his carriage, when required, gentlemanly and military." . . . The study of one particular character had sometimes stamped a mannerism upon actors that they could not get rid of: Henderson, for example, had made Falstaff his own, "but he afterwards Falstaffed everything, he never got the fat out



JACK JOHNSTONE
AS "SIR CALLAGHAN O'BRALLAGHAN."



JACK BANNISTER
AS "COLONEL FEIGNWELL."



MUNDEN AS "SIR FRANCIS GRIPE."



ELLISTON AS "COLONEL FEIGNWELL."

FROM OXBERRY'S "DRAMATIC BIOGRAPHY."

of his throat." . . . But Johnstone never played anything but Irishmen. . . . "Managers and playwrights knew to what extent they might rely upon his powers and attractions, and they did not allow him to remain idle: there was no country, time, or situation wherein Pat was not completely at home. For me, Charles, you know I love the green land of the shamrock, its warm-hearted sons and daughters, and, above all, its lovely music. Think, then, if I cherish not the memory of one who was all in all an Irishman."

The fleeting nature of an actor's fame is a favourite theme for melancholy dissertation; in almost every book about the theatre you will find it dealt with—always in the same spirit, often in the same words. Yet, in this case also there is a reverse side to the medal, and we see it when we read such writings as the "Essays of Elia." Think of Munden, for instance, and Dicky Suett; why, in their stage careers, they served but a brief period of probation: Lamb was their real lessee. He engaged them for all time, and called in all the world to look at them. In his mimic theatre Suett's quaint catchwords resound across the century, and Munden still stands contemplating his tub of butter.

Let us see the last of the actual, corporeal Munden through Elia's eyes. "The regular playgoers ought to put on mourning," he exclaims, in his record of the old actor's farewell performance, "for the king of broad comedy is dead to the drama! Alas, Munden is no more! give sorrow vent. He may yet walk the town, pace the pavement in a seeming existence; eat, drink, and nod to his friends in all the affectation of life—but Munden, *the* Munden—Munden with the bunch of countenances, the bouquet of faces, is gone for ever from the lamps, and, as far as comedy is concerned, is as dead as Garrick!"

The house was crammed—"crammed from the swing door of the pit to the back seat in the banished *one shilling*." A "quart of audience" had been squeezed into "a pint of theatre." And when Munden entered, as Sir Robert Bramble in Colman's *Poor Gentleman*, his reception was tremendous—waving of hats and handkerchiefs, deafening shouts, clamorous beating of sticks: "Mrs. Bamfield worked away with a six-

penny fan till she scudded only under bare poles. Mr. Whittington wore out the ferule of a new nine-and-sixpenny umbrella. Gratitude did great damage on the joyful occasion." Then comes the account of the actual performance:

"The old performer . . . was plainly overcome; he pressed his hands together, he planted one solidly on his breast, he bowed, he sidled, he cried. When the noise subsided (which it invariably does at last), the comedy proceeded and Munden gave an admirable picture of the rich, eccentric, charitable old bachelor baronet, who goes about with Humphrey Dobbin at his heels and philanthropy in his heart. . . ."

The comedy was followed by Dibdin's farce, *Past Ten o'Clock*.

"In the farce he became richer and richer. Old Dozey is a plant from Greenwich. The bronzed face and neck to match—the long curtain of a coat—the straggling white hair—the propensity, the determined attachment, to grog—are all from Greenwich. Munden, as Dozey, seems never to have been out of action, sun, and drink. He looks (alas! he *looked*) fireproof. His face and throat were dried like a raisin, and his legs walked under the rum and water with all the indecision that inestimable beverage usually inspires. It is truly tacking, not walking. He *steers* at a table, and the tide of grog now and then bears him off the point. On this night he seemed to us to be doomed to fall in action, and we therefore looked at him as some of the 'Victory's' crew are said to have gazed upon Nelson, with a consciousness that his ardour and his uniform were worn for the last time. In the scene where Dozey describes a sea-fight the actor never was greater, and he seemed the personification of an old seventy-four! His coat hung like a flag at his poop. . . ."

Then came the last scene of all—the reading of Munden's farewell address. It was "strikingly ineffective," says a more matter-of-fact critic. "Mr. Munden read it to the house; and as in doing so he was obliged to have recourse to his spectacles, which ever and anon were bedewed with tears, the effect was tedious in the extreme." Here is Lamb's account of it:

"The time, however, came for the fall of the curtain and for the fall of Munden! The farce of the night was finished. The farce of the

forty-years play was over! He stepped forward, not as Dozey, but as Munden, and we heard him address us from the stage for the last time. He trusted, unwisely we think, to a written paper. He *read* of 'heartfelt recollections' and indelible impressions. He stammered and he pressed his heart, and put on his spectacles, and blundered his written gratitude, and wiped his eyes, and bowed, and stood, and at last staggered away for ever! The plan of his farewell was bad, but the long life of excellence which really made his farewell pathetic overcame all defects, and the people and Joe Munden parted like lovers! Well! farewell to the Rich Old Heart! May thy retirement be as full of repose, as thy public life was full of excellence. We must all have our farewell benefits in our turn."

Munden, Suett, Liston, and Elliston were all born within sound of Bow Bells. Munden was the son of a poulterer in Holborn, and began life as an apothecary's assistant. Later, he was apprenticed to a law stationer in Chancery Lane. Then he took to the stage. Suett was of gentler birth and of gentler breeding. He is first heard of as a choir-boy at Westminster Abbey, where, according to Oxberry, he has left his mark. "To the activity of his hands and the correctness of his aim," the "Dramatic Biography" tells us, "the public are said to be much indebted for the apparent antiquity of the statues surrounding the abbey; Dicky, like a modern Mohawk, having removed a nose from one, and an arm from another, as it pleased his fertile fancy." Suett "would often speak of his chorister days," says Lamb, "when he was cherub Dicky." Then follow these well-known passages, welcome wherever—and no matter how often—they are met:

"What clipped his wings, or made it expedient that he should exchange the holy for the profane state; whether he had lost his good voice (his best recommendation to that office), like Sir John, 'with hallooing and singing of anthems'; or whether he was adjudged to lack something, even in those early years, of the gravity indispensable to an occupation which professeth to 'commerce with the skies,' I could never rightly learn; but we find him, after the probation of a twelvemonth or so, reverting to a secular condition, and become one of us. . . . I think he was not altogether of that timber out of which cathedral seats and sounding-boards are hewed. But if a glad heart —kind and therefore glad—be any part of sanctity, then might the

robe of Motley which he wore so long with so much blameless satisfaction to himself and to the public be accepted for a surplice—his white stole and *albe*. . . . Care, that troubles all the world, was forgotten in his composition. Had he but two grains (nay, half a grain) of it, he could never have supported himself on those two spiders' strings, which served him (in the latter part of his unmixed existence) as legs. A doubt or a scruple must have made him totter, a sigh have puffed him down; the weight of a frown had staggered him, a wrinkle made him lose his balance. But on he went, scrambling upon those airy stilts of his with Robin Goodfellow, 'thorough brake, thorough briar,' reckless of a scratched face or a torn doublet. . . . Shakespeare foresaw him when he framed his fools and jesters. They have all the true Suett stamp, a loose and shambling gait, a slippery tongue, this last the ready midwife to a without-pain-delivered jest; in words light as air venting truths deep as the centre; with idlest rhymes tagging conceit when busiest, singing with Lear in the tempest, or Sir Toby at the buttery hatch."

Among the score or so of other comedians famous at the beginning of the century, there are eight at least who call for notice even in so casual a chronicle as this—Bensley, the oldest of them all, born in 1738; Quick and Lewis, his juniors by ten years; John Fawcett; John Liston; John Emery; Charles Mathews; and William Farren: then, at last, we shall come to Elliston.

Except as a favourite of Charles Lamb's, Bensley is of no account; and Lamb's panegyric on his Malvolio is said to have been extravagant. Lamb awarded Bensley "a meed of praise," says a Quarterly Reviewer, "at which the few who remember that sensible but stiff performer are enforced to smile." Quick, the original of Tony Lumpkin and Bob Acres, began his career as a tragedian; and, as a strolling player in Kent and Surrey—it seems curious nowadays to think of an actor's world being thus restricted—achieved some success in that capacity. He was engaged by Foote at the Haymarket in 1769. A noisy, unintellectual *farceur*, he was a great favourite with George III. Lewis was also a tragedian to begin with, but it was as the lightest of light comedians that he rose to fame. He was the "Mercutio of his age," declares Leigh Hunt; "invincible airiness and juvenility" were his



SUETT AS "BAYES."

From the painting (artist unknown) at the South Kensington Museum.

most striking characteristics. "His airy breathless voice, thrown to the audience before he appeared, was the signal of his winged animal spirits." When he took farewell of the stage at sixty-five he did not look half his years, and even down to the end of his career he would jump over "the stage properties," we are told, "as though his leap-frog days had just commenced." Here, from the pen of "The Old Playgoer," is a graphic sketch of him, written many years after his death:

"Lewis was a gentleman of a race to which the present selfish, reserved, stiff, unpolite dandy bears no resemblance. Consult old comedies and old paintings for the foplings, the flutters, the wildairs, the travelled macaroni, the creature fluttering in silks, powder and perfume, the butterfly, but the handsome butterfly of human nature—such was Lewis. Graceful in person, sharp, animated, *dégagé;* the most sparkling wit seemed to spring, as from its proper source, from a mouth that was decked with one of the most pleasing smiles I ever beheld. Should I be brought to acknowledge he had a fault, it was restlessness. He was never quiet—I can hardly fancy he is quiet now."

I am not tempted to linger over the careers of Fawcett, Emery, and Liston. Leigh Hunt's pedantic differentiations between their respective styles have, I think, tired me of them. Even Hazlitt grows wearisome in his strenuous study of these lesser lights of the stage.

Emery and Liston were the two great stage rustics of their day—Emery (according to Leigh Hunt), "the more skilled in the habits and cunning of rusticity"; Liston, "in its simplicity and ignorance." Liston was the more gifted of the two. He had "more comic humour," says Hazlitt, "more power of face than any other actor we remember. His farce is not caricature, his drollery oozes out of his features and trickles down his face, his voice is a pitch-pipe for laughter."

But to "The Old Playgoer's" more sensitive spirit there was something painful in many of his performances (just as there would be, doubtless, in those pathetically comic female characters, Katisha and the rest, who alloy the delightfulness of Mr. Gilbert's operas). He is, he protests, by way of preface to his criticism, "no enemy of laughter:"

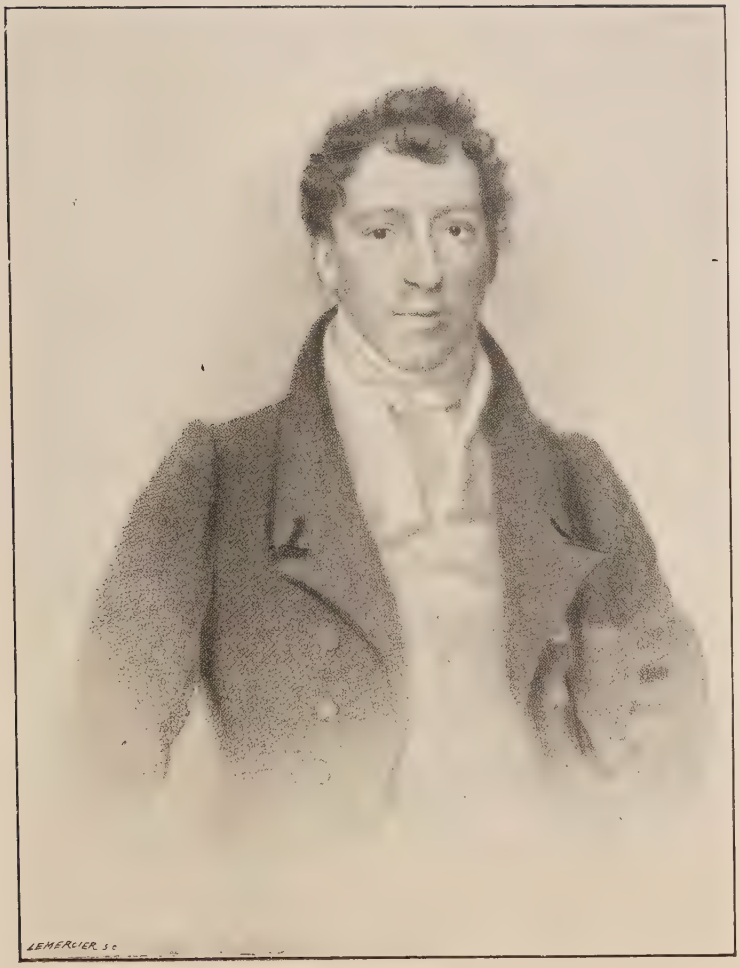
"It does me good to hear a pair of lungs crow like chanticleer—but with a reservation: I love to laugh with a man, not *at* him. Liston's comedy, to me, was such that when I have laughed at it I have always been ashamed of myself; I felt that I ought to have pitied, not laughed. There is a comical side of most human creatures and mundane accidents, and there is likewise a pitiable one: Liston's comedy always appeared to me to belong to the latter. . . . I never came away cheerful from seeing Liston, and never came away from seeing Jack Bannister without feeling ten years younger, and that if I had not, with Christian, got rid of my sins, I had got rid of what was pretty nearly as heavy to carry, my cares."

Perhaps "The Old Playgoer" did not see him as the Dominie in the stage version of *Guy Mannering*. This, from all accounts, should have been enjoyable even to him. Mr. Donaldson, himself a player of the period, pays, in his "Fifty Years of Green-Room Gossip," an enthusiastic tribute to this impersonation—its richness, quaintness, and pathos. By a look, he tells us, the actor could convulse the whole house with screams of laughter; "and when he departed from the stage of life the Dominie went with him."

Emery was, in private life, a man of many accomplishments—something of an artist and an excellent musician. On the stage his principal talent, as we have seen, lay in the depicting of rustic character, Yorkshire character especially. "He was so perfect a representative of the loutish cunning of the Three Ridings," says Boaden, "that it was difficult to believe that he had or could have any personal qualities to discriminate the man from the actor." But he was not confined to comedy. "His Tyke," says Talfourd (who was, however, somewhat free with his superlatives), "was the grandest specimen of the rude sublime." His "Tyke," indeed, was his one real triumph. To us it is a name and nothing more.

Of Fawcett there is still less to record. Here is Talfourd's account of him:

"He had not the facility or richness of Munden, nor the antique elegance of Farren—he could not play grotesque parts like the first, nor elderly beaux like the last; but in representations of bluff honesty and rude manly feeling he had no rival. His performances were eminently English."



CHARLES MATHEWS THE ELDER.

From an old engraving (1825).

The elder Mathews was (allowing for the difference in their physique) the Corney Grain of his time. It is by his wonderful powers of mimicry and by his success as an entertainer that he is famous. Some idea of the nature of his Lyceum "At Homes," begun in 1818, is to be got from a contemporary newspaper, quoted in Mr. Clark Russell's "Representative Actors." In the particular performance described, he appears in a succession of contrasted characters—as a strolling actor, as a country manager who has refused to engage him "because he lacks versatility," as an applicant for the post of prompter, as a French tragedian, as a runaway stage-struck apprentice, as a Scotch pawnbroker in the apprentice's pursuit, as the pawnbroker's wife, as a fat coachman, and then finally as the country manager and strolling player once again, the latter's versatility, as shown in his assumption of all the other *rôles*, being triumphantly established. Thus recorded in bald outline (and the newspaper account of it is not much more effective) it does not strike one as so very funny; but it amused the playgoers of those days, doubtless, as much as Corney Grain, or Fred Leslie, or Mr. Arthur Roberts have amused in similar fashion the playgoers of to-day.

There was little resemblance between the elder and the younger Mathews, but in reading of "Old Farren" one is constantly reminded of his son, the accomplished comedian still happily among us. This is especially true of his Sir Peter. Might not this description (from the pen of Leigh Hunt) have been written of the William Farren of to-day?

> "His acting in the French milliner part of that most admirable scene of the screen (one of the most perfect, if not the most so, in all comedy) was brought up to a climax of humour, the excess of which he contrived, wonderfully well, to refer to the imbecility of age. He twittered, and shook, and gaped, and giggled, and was bent double with an absolute rapture of incapacity."

And one feels that, had he had the opportunity, the son might have rivalled the father in those other eighteenth century characters thus referred to in one of Hazlitt's most characteristic essays:

"He plays the old gentleman, the antiquated beau of the last age, very much after the fashion we remember to have seen in our younger days, that is quite a singular excellence in this. Is it that Mr. Farren has caught glimpses of this character in real life hovering in the horizon of the sister kingdom, which has been long banished from this? They have their Castle Rack-Rents, their moats and ditches, still extant in remote parts of the interior: and perhaps in famed Dublin city, the *chevaux-de-frise* of dress, the frilled work of lace and ruffles, the masked battery of compliment, the portcullises of formal speech, the whole artillery of sighs and ogling, with all the appendages and proper costume of the *ancien régime*, and paraphernalia of the *preux chevalier*, may have been kept up in a state of lively decrepitude and smiling dilapidation in a few straggling instances from the last century, which Mr. Farren had seen. The present age produces nothing of the sort.

Even as regards their personal appearance the description of the one would serve almost for a description of the other. The principal difference, one gathers, lies in the more benevolent demeanour, the more sympathetic expression, of the son. Here is a pen-picture of the elder Farren drawn from memory by Mr. Dutton Cook in his "Hours with the Players":

"Looking back five and thirty years, he was, as I remember him at sixty, a very handsome old gentleman, with fine clear-cut features, a fresh complexion, keen clear china-blue eyes, expressive mobile brows, and what Mr. Lewes describes as 'a wonderful hanging under-lip,' of much service to him in his exhibitions of character. His voice was firm and resonant; he spoke after the staccato manner of the old stage; his laugh was very pleasant. He dressed perfectly, avoiding all unseemly youthfulness of clothing, but ever 'point-device' in his elderly accoutrements: he was at home and comfortable alike in the broad skirts, the huge cuffs, and the flowered waistcoats of the times of Anne and the earlier Georges, as in the buttoned blue swallow-tails of the Regency . . . he was always a gentleman—if a gentleman of the old school. Polite age had never a more adroit and complete stage representative."

Choleric guardians, testy fathers, jealous husbands, superannuated fops of comedy—these were the characters that Farren chiefly had to represent, unsympathetic characters almost all, exciting the least amiable kind of laughter. He had

played such parts from the first and went on with them until nature supplied him with real in lieu of painted "wrinkles." He acted until 1851, and his son began in 1854, so that their joint careers may be said almost to span the century.

It were easier to treat of Elliston, the "Great Lessee," in thirty or forty of these pages than in the three or four which are his due. Indeed, to squeeze him into so narrow a compass is like the confining of the Arabian genie into his imprisoning bottle; for Greatness was Elliston's forte. He was a more magnificent Micawber. To Micawber's buoyant spirits and flowery speech he added the deportment of a Turveydrop, the enterprise of a Napoleon, the dignity of a Grand Monarque. His greatness (like Baçon's, in the eyes of Ben Jonson) was inherent, says Charles Lamb, not dependent upon circumstance. Now, enthroned at Drury Lane; now, in retirement at the little Olympic "—his *Elba*": he is always the Great Elliston. *Cælum non animum mutant.*

It was in the squalid little green room of the Olympic that Lamb was witness to the "rich scene" he has described with such rich humour:

"There, after his deposition from imperial Drury, he substituted a throne. That Olympic Hill was his 'highest heaven'; himself, 'Jove in his chair.' There he sat in state, while before him, on complaint of prompter, was brought for judgment—how shall I describe her?—one of those tawdry little things that flirt at the tails of choruses—a probationer for the town, in either of its senses—the pertest little drab—a dirty fringe and appendage of the lamp's smoke—who, it seems, on some disapprobation expressed by a highly respectable audience, had precipitately quitted her station on the boards, and withdrawn her small talents in disgust. 'And how dare you,' said her manager, assuming a censorial severity which would have crushed the confidence of a Vestris, and disarmed that beautiful rebel herself of her professional caprice—I verily believe he thought *her* standing before him—'how dare you, madam, withdraw yourself without a notice from your theatrical duties?' 'I was hissed, sir.' 'And you have the presumption to decide upon the taste of the town?' 'I don't know that, sir, but I will never stand to be hissed,' was the rejoinder of young Confidence; when, gathering up his features into one significant maze of wonder, pity, and expostulatory indignation—in a lesson never to have been

lost upon a creature less forward than she who stood before him—his words were these: 'They have hissed *me!*'

"'Twas the identical argument, *à fortiori*, which the son of Peleus uses to Lycaon, trembling under his lance, to persuade him to take his destiny with a good grace: 'I too am mortal.' And it is to be believed that in both cases the rhetoric missed of its application for want of a proper understanding with the faculties of the respective recipients."

"A dabbler in everything, a master of nothing," says, of Elliston, a writer in "The Dramatic Biography," summing up an account of his career, or rather, of his careers, for he had many. "While Mrs. Elliston pursued her avocations as a teacher of singing," this writer tells us, "Mr. Elliston acted in the multifarious capacities of a bookseller, a Birmingham manager, the absolute regent of the Pavilion, the tragic and comic muse of Drury Lane, the friend of all the lovers of private theatricals, and the nightly ornament of the club in Albemarle Street."

Versatility was at once his strength and his weakness. Had he confined himself wholly to tragedy or wholly to comedy his reputation had been still higher. "He is already the second tragedian on the stage," says Leigh Hunt in the course of a long appreciation written in 1807, seven years before Kean's arrival, "and he wants nothing but study and a more heroic countenance to be at least equal to Mr. Kemble, whom in the true inspiration of his art I think he excels. His person is elegant, but let us examine the deficiencies of his face, his peeping eyes, and his truly English nose, and it will be astonishing to consider what a dignity as well as general variety he can summon to his features, and how infinitely he is superior in general expression to Mr. Charles Kemble and Mr. Henry Johnston, actors blessed with faces of handsome tragedy."

It was at Leamington that Lamb saw him for the first time. A member of his family had just started "The Leamington Spa Library"; the great man had come down to "auspicate" it, and set it "a-going with a lustre." At the moment he was holding forth (in true Micawber fashion, one feels sure) on the

merits of a certain new publication, his enchanted customers, two damsels fair, hanging on his lips. "So have I seen a gentleman in comedy *acting* the shopman. So Lovelace sold his gloves in King Street. I admired the histrionic art by which he contrived to carry clean away every notion of disgrace from the occupation he had so generously submitted to; and from that hour I judged him, with no after repentance, to be a person with whom it would be a felicity to be more acquainted."

To Elliston's social attractiveness everyone bears witness, but for the best account of it we must again have recourse to Lamb:

"Wherever Elliston walked, sat, or stood still, there was the theatre. . . . I have known actors—and some of them of Elliston's own stamp—who shall have agreeably been amusing you in the part of a rake and coxcomb through the two or three hours of their dramatic existence, but no sooner does the curtain fall with its leaden clatter but a spirit of lead seems to fall on all their faculties. They emerge sour, morose persons, intolerable to their families, servants, etc. . . . Elliston was more of a piece. Did he *play* Ranger? and did Ranger fill the general bosom of the town with satisfaction? Why should *he* not be Ranger, and diffuse the same cordial satisfaction among his private circle? With *his* temperament, *his* animal spirits, *his* good nature, *his* follies, perchance could he do better than identify himself with his impersonation?"

And here is a supplementary glimpse of him, in Lamb's happiest vein:

"Those who knew Elliston will know the *manner* in which he pronounced the latter sentence of the few words I am about to record. One proud day to me he took his roast mutton with us in the Temple, to which I had super-added a preliminary haddock. After a rather plentiful partaking of this meagre banquet, not unrefreshed with the humbler sort of liquors, I made a sort of apology for the humility of the fare, observing that, for my own part, I never ate but one dish at dinner. 'I too never eat but one thing at dinner,' was his reply; then, after a pause, 'reckoning fish as nothing.' The manner was all. It was as if by one peremptory sentence he had decreed the annihilation of all the savoury esculents which the pleasant and nutritious food-giving ocean pours forth upon poor humans from her watery bosom.

This was *greatness*, tempered with considerate *tenderness* to the feelings of his scanty but welcoming entertainer."

There are a score of other writers who have found pleasant things to tell of the Great Lessee, but here we must take leave of him, and we cannot do so better than by echoing the words of Lamb. "Joyousest of once embodied spirits," Lamb exclaims in his apostrophe "To the Shade of Elliston" —in that highest flight of his fancy, occasioned by the actor's death—"Joyousest of once embodied spirits, whither at length hast thou flown? to what genial region are we permitted to conjecture that thou hast flitted? Art thou sowing thy WILD OATS yet (the harvest-time was still to come with thee) upon casual sands of Avernus? or art thou enacting ROVER (as we would gladlier think) by wandering Elysian streams?"

But you remember the whole passage, doubtless?—the "Limbo somewhere for Players"—the "Green Rooms impervious to mortal eye"—the "thin ghosts of figurantes (never plump on earth)"—the "Stygian wherry" and the stripping "for the last voyage"; and then that last and most characteristic touch of all about "honest Rhadamanth, always partial to players," who shall courteously dismiss him "at the right-hand gate—the O.P. side of Hades—that conducts to masques and merry-makings in the Theatre Royal of Proserpine."

And so farewell both to Elliston and to Elia!

CHAPTER V

KEAN AND BOOTH

When William Charles Macready was going home from Rugby in December, 1808, for the Christmas holidays, he found he had to break his journey at Birmingham for the night. Like any other schoolboy in such circumstances, he determined to spend the evening at the theatre. A "serious pantomime," founded on the ballad of Alonzo and Imogene, was the piece produced. The young Rugbeian did not think much of the performance. "Fair Imogene" was represented by the manager's wife, "a female porpoise"; while, "as if in studied contrast to this enormous hill of flesh, a little mean-looking man, in a shabby green satin dress, appeared as the hero, Alonzo the Brave. . . . How little did I know or could guess," proceeds Macready, recalling the incident in his autobiography, half a century later, "that under the shabby green satin dress was hidden one of the most extraordinary theatrical geniuses that have ever illustrated the dramatic poetry of England!"

Kean was then in his twenty-first year. The son of a strolling player—good-for-nothing Nance Carey, granddaughter of Henry Carey (the author of "Sally in our Alley"), illegitimate son of the great Lord Halifax—he had been a strolling player himself almost from his birth. In 1789, at the age of two, he appeared as Cupid in a ballet at Her Majesty's Theatre. In 1791 he was a Demon at Drury Lane. Some years later he was to be seen dancing and singing at country fairs. In 1801, at Drury Lane once more, he played Arthur to the King John of Kemble and the Constance of Mrs. Siddons. Abandoning Shakespeare for the circus, he became a tumbler, and, tumbling, broke both his legs. Then came his first appearance at the Haymarket, in 1806, as Ganem

(a minor *rôle*) in *The Mountaineers*, filling him with new hopes.

Hopes speedily blighted. An application to John Kemble for engagement at Drury Lane met with refusal, and Kean, the Haymarket season ended, was again a strolling player. From this point onwards all sorts of romantic stories are told of his career—mainly true, doubtless, but, as Huck Finn would say, "with some stretchers": how, "being at Rochester, without a penny to pay the ferry toll, he, with his whole wardrobe tied up in a pocket-handkerchief and slung round his neck, swam across the river"; how, acting at Sheerness as Alexander the Great, in Lee's tragedy, and being greeted by some officers in the stage box as "Alexander the Little," he "advanced, with folded arms and a look that appalled the sneerers, close to the box and said, 'Yes, but with a *great soul!*'" how, being called upon to play Laertes to "Master Betty's" Hamlet, he betook himself in dudgeon to "the fields and the woods," and lived on turnips and cabbages for three whole days. But for all these tales, if you would read them, I must refer you to his biographers.

To return to the year 1808. It was in July of this year that Kean married Mary Chambers, a Waterford girl, eight years his senior, whom he had met at Gloucester, and with whom he had been acting. In 1809 we find him in his wife's native city. Grattan, the Irish statesman and orator, has left us a sympathetic sketch of a typical Kean evening—his Benefit, as a matter of fact—at the Waterford Theatre in 1809. "The play," he says, "was Hannah More's tragedy of *Percy*, in which he of course played the hero. Elwina was played by Mrs. Kean, who was applauded to her heart's content. Kean was so popular, both as an actor and from the excellent character he bore, that the audience thought less of the actress's demerits than of the husband's feelings; and besides this the *débutante* had many personal friends in her native city and among the gentry of the neighbourhood, for she had been governess to the children of a lady of good fortune, who used all her influence at this benefit. After the tragedy Kean gave a specimen of tight-rope dancing, and another of sparring with

a professional pugilist. He then played the leading part in a musical interlude, and finished with Chimpanzee, the monkey, in the melodramatic pantomime of *La Pérouse*, and in this character he showed agility scarcely since surpassed by Mazurice and Gauffé, and touches of deep tragedy in the monkey's death scene which made the audience shed tears."

With a wife to provide for now, and two sons as well—Howard, born in Wales, and Charles, at Waterford—Kean's struggle during the next five years was harder than ever. Perhaps his bitterest experience was at Guernsey. The local critic fell foul of his Hamlet with a vicious insolence hardly to be paralleled in the history of the press. He was ridiculed for his "impudence and incompetency," his voice was described as harsh and monotonous, and his figure as "one of the vilest" ever seen "on or off the stage," though suited certainly to the deformities of Richard; altogether his performance was condemned as one of the most terrible misrepresentations to which Shakespeare had ever been subjected. The criticism seems to have made some stir, for when Kean made his next appearance, as Richard III., he found himself face to face with an uproarious audience come to treat him as a butt. This was a *rôle*, however, for which Kean was eminently unsuited, and his fiery spirit declared itself much as Cooke's was wont to do under such circumstances. When he came to the line—

"Unmannered dogs! stand ye when I command,"

he declaimed it at his turbulent listeners with a fierce scorn which startled them, and met the shouts for an apology which followed with an elaborate expression of his contempt. Further unpleasantness was avoided during his stay upon the island through the friendly offices of the Governor, Sir John Doyle.

This was in 1811. Two years later fortune smiled on him for the first time. On November 14th, 1813, he had to appear as Octavian in *The Mountaineers* at Dorchester. The theatre was half empty, but in the stage box was a Mr. Arnold, come thither on behalf of the management of Drury Lane, attracted by reports of the young actor's genius. What he saw satisfied him. A three years' engagement, on terms in-

creasing from eight to twelve guineas a week, was the immediate result, and before three months had elapsed Kean had come to London for good, had been seen and had conquered.

January 26th, 1814, was the date of his triumph. Hazlitt was present, and thus records his impression of the event in "The Morning Chronicle" of January 27th. I give his criticism in full:

"Mr. Kean (of whom report had spoken highly) last night made his appearance at Drury Lane Theatre, in the character of Shylock. For voice, eye, action and expression, no actor has come out for many years at all equal to him. The applause, from the first scene to the last, was general, loud and uninterrupted. Indeed, the very first scene in which he comes on with Bassanio and Antonio showed the master in his art, and at once decided the opinion of the audience. Perhaps it was the most perfect of any. Notwithstanding the complete success of Mr. Kean in the part of Shylock, we question whether he will not become a greater favourite in other parts. There was a lightness and vigour in his tread, a buoyancy and elasticity of spirit, a fire and animation, which would accord better with almost any other character than with the morose, sullen, inward, inveterate, inflexible malignity of Shylock. The character of Shylock is that of a man brooding over one idea, that of his wrongs, and bent on one unalterable purpose, that of revenge. In conveying a profound impression of this feeling, or in embodying the general conception of rigid and uncontrollable self-will, equally proof against every sentiment of humanity or prejudice of opinion, we have seen actors more successful than Mr. Kean; but in giving effect to the conflict of passions arising out of the contrasts of situation, in varied vehemence of declamation, in keenness of sarcasm, and the rapidity of his transitions from one tone and feeling to another, in propriety and novelty of action, presenting a succession of striking pictures, and giving perpetually fresh shocks of delight and surprise, it would be difficult to single out a competitor. The fault of his acting was (if we may hazard the objection) an over-display of the resources of the art, which gave too much relief to the hard, impenetrable dark groundwork of the character of Shylock. It would be endless to point out individual beauties where almost every passage was received with equal and deserved applause. We thought, in one or two instances, the pauses in the voice were too long, and too great a reliance placed on the expression of the countenance, which is a language intelligible only to a part of the house."

Hazlitt has not attempted in this case, as was his ordinary



EDMUND KEAN AS "SIR GILES OVERREACH."

From the painting (artist unknown) at the South Kensington Museum.

custom, to expound Kean's conception of the character, and correct or compare it with his own; in a subsequent essay, published two years later, he indicates it more clearly in a quaint sentence: "Shakespeare," he says, in justification of Kean's rendering of the part, "could not easily divest his characters of their entire humanity: his Jew is more than half a Christian." How his Jewish readers must have thanked him for that word!

The substitution of a black wig for the traditional red one was an outward sign of the inward change which came over the stage Shylock as Kean depicted him. He docked the *rôle* of all its farcical elements, and gave it more dignity as well as more tragic significance. Cooke, upon whom Macklin's gabardine had fallen—Garrick having never played the part—had represented Shylock merely as the personification of hate and revenge: Kean made him human.

And as he made Shylock "half a Christian" so he made Othello half a white man. Betterton, Quin, Garrick, and John Kemble had all played the character with black faces. Kean substituted light brown. To these innovations he added another, even more epoch-making, in *Macbeth*—the transformation of the witches scene from uproarious farce to weird tragedy;[1] ever since the Restoration, when they were impersonated by low comedians, the witches had been played as comic characters, dressed like the conventional witches of fairy lore, and performing all sorts of queer antics with their brooms. These three achievements, of no little importance in themselves, may be taken, I think, as distinctive illustrations of Kean's revolt against tradition—one of the most notable features of his career.

Richard III., Kean's next impersonation, had been Cooke's

[1] Kemble, to give him his due, had attempted this reform, but in vain. At Bath in 1803 he tried the experiment of omitting the witches' dance, but the audience clamoured for it, and he had to give in. "From that time to 1828," says Genest, "whenever *Macbeth* has been acted at Bath, it has been accompanied with an exhibition which would disgrace the lowest strollers in a barn. The dance was attended with more applause than the finest scenes in the play, and that not merely from the gallery but from the other parts of the house."

great part; but, according to Hazlitt, Kean outshone him. Though deficient in dignity, Kean gave an "animation and vigour" to the *rôle* which Hazlitt had never before witnessed. His acting in the courtship scene was an admirable exhibition of smooth and smiling villainy:

"The progress of wily adulation, of encroaching humility, was finely marked throughout by the action, voice and eye. He seemed, like the first tempter, to approach his prey certain of the event, and as if success had smoothed the way before him. We remember Mr. Cooke's manner of representing the scene was more violent, hurried, and full of anxious uncertainty. This, though more natural in general, was, we think, less in character. Richard should woo, not as a lover, but as an actor, to show his mental superiority and power to make others the plaything of his will."

But the concluding scene, in which he is killed by Richmond, was the most brilliant of all:

"He fought like one drunk with wounds: and the attitude in which he stands with his hands stretched out, after his sword is taken from him, had a preternatural and terrific grandeur, as if his will could not be disarmed, and the very phantoms of his despair had a withering power."

It was in death scenes, indeed, so far as one can gather from all that has been written about his acting, that Kean's histrionic genius found its highest expression. To this account of his death as Richard may be added a most interesting comparison of his deaths as Hamlet and as Othello. It is from a letter to "The Tatler" of September 23rd, 1831, and is from the pen of a reader of Leigh Hunt's criticisms in that paper. It supplements in so interesting a fashion Hunt's own dramatic criticisms, that Mr. Archer has included it in his collection of Leigh Hunt's Essays. The writer's immediate object is to show how Kean discriminated between the different kinds of death he had to portray:

"Richard, for instance, has fought five combats and has traversed the field in a frenzy, and when he meets Richmond, he is in a state of the highest excitement, smarting with wounds. How finely does Kean depict this as the contest concludes: he is reduced to a state resembling

the stupor of intoxication—he falls from exhaustion—and as loss of blood may be presumed to cool his frame and restore his sanity, so does he grow calmer and calmer through the dying speech, till his mighty heart is hushed for ever. In *Othello*, death is occasioned by piercing himself to the heart with a poignard: can you not mark the frozen shudder, as the steel enters his frame, and the choking expression, with distended eyes and open mouth, the natural attendants of such an agony? Death by a heart wound is instantaneous. Thus does he portray it; he literally dies standing; it is the dead body only of Othello that falls, heavily and at once; there is no rebound which speaks of vitality and of living muscles. It is the dull weight of clay seeking its kindred earth.

"But the scene that actors admire most (perhaps audiences, from the remoteness, least) is the death in *Hamlet*. The Prince does not die of a sword wound, but from the poison impregnated in that wound: of course, from its rapidity in doing the work of death, it must have been a powerful mineral. What are the effects of such a poison? Intense internal pain, wandering vision, swelling veins in the temple. All this Kean details with awful reality: his eye dilates and then loses lustre; he gnaws his hand in the vain effort to repress emotion; the veins thicken in his forehead; his limbs shudder and quiver, and, as life grows fainter and his hand drops from between his stiffening lips, he utters a cry of expiring nature, so exquisite that I can only compare it to the stifled sob of a fainting woman, or the little wail of a suffering child."

Hamlet was Kean's third *rôle* at Drury Lane. It seemed to Hazlitt a less perfect performance as a whole than his Richard or his Shylock, though it was calculated to raise him still higher in general estimation. It was "too strong and pointed. There was often a severity, approaching to virulence, in the common observations and answers. There is nothing of this in Hamlet." And the critic proceeds to describe the character as it should be played, and as Kean did not play it:

"He is, as it were, wrapped up in the cloud of his reflections, and only *thinks aloud*. There should, therefore, be no attempt to impress what he says upon others by any exaggeration of emphasis or manner, no talking *at* his hearers. There should be as much of the gentleman and scholar as possible infused into the part, and as little of the actor. A pensive air of sadness should sit unwillingly upon his brow, but no appearance of fixed and sullen gloom. He is full of 'weakness and

melancholy,' but there is no harshness in his nature. Hamlet should be the most amiable of misanthropes."

Kean was too vehement also with Ophelia:

"But whatever nice faults might be found in this scene, they were amply redeemed by the manner of his coming back after he has gone to the extremity of the stage, from a pang of parting tenderness to press his lips to Ophelia's hand. It had an electrical effect on the house. It was the finest commentary that was ever made on Shakespeare. It explained the character at once (as he meant it) as one of disappointed hope, of bitter regret, of affection suspended, not obliterated, by the distractions of the scenes around him."

After Hamlet came Othello, perhaps his greatest triumph of all, despite his defects of voice and stature. It "is his best character," Hazlitt says, "and the highest effort of genius upon the stage"; but he "was too often in the highest key of passion, too uniformly on the verge of extravagance, too constantly on the rack." Iago came next: "The most faultless of his performances, the most consistent and entire. Perhaps the accomplished hypocrite was never so finely, so adroitly portrayed—a gay, light-hearted monster, a careless, cordial, comfortable villain." This was his last impersonation in his first season. He was now famous throughout England, and rich to boot. He had saved the falling fortunes of Drury Lane, and reaped his reward in money no less than in honours.

His next season was less brilliant, though his Macbeth came to be regarded as among his greatest achievements, one scene in it especially: "The hesitation," says Hazlitt, "the bewildered look, the coming to himself when he sees his hands bloody; the manner in which his voice clung to his throat and choked his utterance; his agony and tears, the force of nature overcome by passion, beggared description." His Romeo was a failure, and his Richard II. a doubtful success; while two non-Shakespearean *rôles* in which he appeared—Zanga in *The Revenge*, a Moorish Iago of a sort, and Abel Drugger in *The Alchymist*, a comic character—did not add greatly to his renown.



EDMUND KEAN AS "BRUTUS."

From an old engraving.

On January 14th, 1816, however, he appeared for the first time in a *rôle* with which he soon became identified more than with any other, that of Sir Giles Overreach, in Massinger's play, until then neglected, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*. "If he can stretch that hideous character," wrote Mrs. Piozzi to a friend before the performance, "as he does others, quite beyond all the author meant or wished, it will shock us too much for endurance, though in these days people do require mustard with everything." Stretch it he did, and with such effect that in the gloating words of his rapt biographer, Mr. F. W. Hawkins, "he drove women from the theatre in hysterics, sent the greatest poet of that or any other age into a convulsive fit, and established by his wild energy and intense passion a fame so great, a triumph so perfect, that all London may be said to have looked on and envied him." In one scene in the play Kean's expression of face was so terrible that "scream after scream reverberated through the theatre," and even veteran actors trembled behind the scenes.

His Luke, in Massinger's *City Madam* (or rather in Sir John Burgess's version of it, entitled *Riches, or the Wife and Brother*), was a companion picture of wickedness. Thereby hangs a tale, rendered not the less humorous by the solemn way in which Mr. Hawkins tells it. "The best testimony," he says, "to the excellence of Kean's Luke, however, is to be sought for in private life rather than in the earnest applause which rewarded his exertions in the character. An old lady admired his acting so much that she made no secret of her intention to bequeath him a large sum of money, but she was so appalled by the cold-blooded villainy of Luke that, attributing the skill of the actor to the inherent possession of the fiendish attributes he so consummately embodied, her regard gave place to suspicion and distrust; and upon her death, which took place shortly afterwards, it was found that the sum originally intended for the actor had been left to a distant relation, of whom she knew nothing but by name."

No actor who ever lived was more unequal, probably, than Edmund Kean. It was no easy matter, as Hazlitt said,

to praise him or to blame him too much. Hazlitt himself went as far as he could go in both directions. With the possible exception of Mrs. Siddons, he had, he says, seen no actor to compare with him. Nor, he continues, "except in voice and person, and the conscious ease and dignity naturally resulting from those advantages, do we know that even Mrs. Siddons was greater. In truth of nature and force of passion, in discrimination and originality, we see no inferiority to anyone on the part of Kean; but there is an insignificance of figure, and a hoarseness of voice, that necessarily vulgarize or diminish our idea of the characters he plays; and perhaps to this may be added a want of a certain elevation and magnitude of thought, of which Mrs. Siddons's noble form seemed to be the only natural mould and receptacle."

Yet this great actor, who alone could bear comparison with "The Tragic Muse," seemed to him at times "like a pasteboard figure, the little uncouth, disproportioned parts of which children pull awry, twitch and jerk about in fifty odd and unaccountable directions, to laugh at; or like the mock figure of harlequin that is stuck against the wall and pulled in pieces and fastened together again with twenty idle pantomimic eccentric absurdities!"

A hardly less piquant contrast is afforded by the views of Leigh Hunt and William Robson. Kemble, according to Leigh Hunt, had faded before Kean like a tragedy ghost. "Kemble's Othello," he declared, "was not the man, but his mask; a trophy, a consul's robe, a statue; or, if you please, a rhetorician. It was Addison's Cato, or an actor's Schoolmaster, which you will; but neither Shakespeare nor genuine acting." Kemble had never moved him except as Lear. Kean he never saw "without being moved, and moved too in fifty ways—by his sarcasm, his sweetness, his pathos, his exceeding grace, his gallant levity, his measureless dignity: for his little person absolutely becomes tall, and rises to the height of moral grandeur, in such characters as that of Othello."

"Kean was a vulgar actor," writes "The Old Playgoer," Kemble's strongest partisan; "You will say that nature is sometimes vulgar. True, but then her uses must be considered.

George Morland could get up and go out of the public-house parlour, where he had been living for days, and, to please and satisfy Boniface, paint his darling porker or pet donkey to the life; but he could not under such inspiration have painted a Madonna or realized an Imogen. . . . Kean wanted finish, he wanted study, his mind was not cultivated. I don't think he ever sat half an hour in the presence of an educated gentleman in his life. From the moment of his attaining to celebrity, and with it obtaining money, who were his associates? What were his amusements? Were his companions such as would keep his mind in tone for the delineation of the heart-breaking of the noble Moor?"

There is exaggeration in "The Old Playgoer's" rhetoric, but truth as well. The brandy bottle was a principal factor in Kean's existence, and soon had done its work.

Skipping the intermediate years, with their tale of his weaknesses and wild escapades, his follies and misfortunes, let us content ourselves with a single glimpse of the great actor in his decline:

"To those who saw him from the front there was not a trace of weakening power in him. But oh, ye few who stood in between the wings, where a chair was placed for him, do you not remember the saddening spectacle of that wrecked genius; a man in his very prime, with not merely the attributes of age about him, but with some of the infirmities of it, which are wont to try the heart of love itself! Have you forgotten that helpless, speechless, fainting man bent up in that chair; or the very unsavoury odour of the very brown, very hot, and very strong brandy and water which alone kept alive the once noble Moor? Aye, and still noble Moor: for when his time came he looked about as from a dream, and sighed, and painfully got to his feet, swayed like a column in an earthquake, and in not more time than is required in telling it was before the audience, as strong and as intellectually beautiful as of old, but only happy in the applause, which gave him a little breathing space and saved him from falling dead upon the stage."[1]

Shylock, Talfourd tells us, was the one part Kean still played as finely as ever in his closing years; his Sir Giles was no longer so terrible as when it "sent Lord Byron into

[1] Dr. Doran, in his "In and About Drury Lane."

hysterics, and made Mrs. Glover tremble." His Othello, "which as once played was equal to anything perhaps ever presented on the stage," had "altered greatly for the worse":

"But of all Mr. Kean's parts that which anyone who desires to retain an unclouded admiration of his powers should most sedulously avoid is Richard. For myself I never thought his Richard altogether worthy of him, though it had many brilliant hits, and was nobly redeemed by the fighting at the end; and now the last act, where all should be bustle, fire and fury, is painfully and pitiably feeble. He whispers when he should shout, creeps and totters about the stage when he should spring or rush forward, and is even palpably assisted by his adversary to fight or fall. Yet his last look at Richmond as he stands is fearful, as if the agony of death gave him power to menace his conqueror with the ghostly terrors of the world into which the murderous tyrant is entering."

With these views may be compared a tribute from the pen of Fanny Kemble, Charles Kemble's daughter:

"Kean is gone, and with him are gone Othello, Shylock, and Richard. I have lived among those whose theatrical creed would not allow them to acknowledge him as a great actor; but they must be bigoted indeed who would deny that he was a great genius—a man of most original and striking powers, careless of art, perhaps, because he did not need it, but possessing those rare gifts of nature without which art is as a dead body. Who that ever heard will ever forget the beauty, the unutterable tenderness of his reply to Desdemona's entreaties for Cassio: 'Let him come when he will; I can deny thee nothing'; the deep despondency of his 'O now farewell'; and the miserable anguish of his 'Oh, Desdemona, away, away!' Who that ever saw will ever forget the fascination of his dying eyes in Richard, when deprived of his sword. The wondrous power of his look seemed yet to avert the uplifted arm of Richmond. If he was irregular and unartist-like in his performance, so is Niagara compared with the waterworks of Versailles."

One other description from the reminiscences of another actor, George Vandenhoff, deserves to be added:

"Poor Kean! I was but a boy when I saw him in his decadence—worn out in constitution, not by years—but I shall never forget him. . . . His style was impulsive, fitful, flashing, abounding in quick transitions; scarcely giving you time to think, but ravishing your

wonder, and carrying you on with his impetuous rush and change of expression. But this seeming spontaneity was not *chance work;* much of it, most of it, was carefully premeditated and prepared. . . . His delivery of Othello's farewell ran on the same tones and semi-tones, had the same rests and breaks, the same *forte* and *piano*, the same *crescendo* and *diminuendo*, night after night, as if he spoke it from a musical score."

On March 12th, 1833, Kean performed for the last time at Drury Lane; he was living now at Richmond, in a little cottage adjoining the local theatre, whose boards he had often trod. On March 25th he reappeared at Covent Garden to act Othello, with his son Charles as Iago and Ellen Tree as Desdemona. He put forth all his powers on this occasion; the effort was too much for him, and in the fourth act he fell fainting into his son's arms, gasping out the words "I am dying; speak to them for me." He was carried off the stage and conveyed home, where he died on May 15th.

Only once in his career was Kean's pre-eminence seriously threatened. This was in 1817, when a young actor named Junius Brutus Booth made his first appearance on the stage of Covent Garden. Physically Booth was Kean's superior, though closely resembling him. A personal description from the pen of his biographer enables us to realize how formidable a rival he must have seemed, more especially by reason of his voice, for many of Kean's performances suffered seriously from his vocal deficiencies; Kean had the eye of an eagle, according to Hazlitt, and the voice of a raven. "In person," says Mr. Gould, the biographer in question, "Mr. Booth was short, spare and muscular; with a head and face of antique beauty; dark hair, blue eyes, a neck and chest of ample but symmetrical mould; a step and movement elastic, assured, kingly. His face was pale, but with that healthy pallor which is one sign of a magnetic brain. Throughout his brief, close-knit, imperial figure nature had planted or diffused her most vital magnetic forces; and made it the capable servant of the commanding mind that descended into and possessed it in every fibre." His voice was "deep, massive, resonant, many-stringed,

changeful, vast in volume, of marvellous flexibility and range; delivering with ease, and power of instant and total interchange, trumpet tones, bell tones, tones like the sound of many waters, like the muffled and confluent roar of bleak grown pines. . . . But it was marked by one significant limitation: it had no mirth. There were tones of light, but none of levity; no laughter, but that terrific laughter in Shylock, which seemed torn from the malignant heart at the announcement of Antonio's losses. It is true Mr. Booth played in farce. . . . But his acting in this kind was never to our taste. . . . His farce was simply the negation of his tragedy; in it he took the *one* step from the sublime. The sunny blue eye, the genial smile, the pleasantry we found so winning in social intercourse, never appeared upon the stage. His genius and the voice it swayed were dedicated to tragedy. . . . It might be said that as Phidias had blended the lion into the god in the face of Jupiter, Booth lifted the lion's voice into the human scale and bade it 'roar and thunder in the index' of the stormy passion."

Mr. Gould proceeds to draw an interesting comparison and contrast between the two actors. "All records and all reports agree," he says, "in representing Kean's performances as fearfully intense, inevitably aiming to express character by single strokes of overwhelming energy or heart-broken pathos, and leaving between the strokes wide intervals of dullness. Coleridge said that to see him was 'like reading Shakespeare by flashes of lightning.' . . . To see Booth at his best was *not* like reading Shakespeare by flashes of lightning, in which a blinding glare alternates with the fearful suspense of darkness; but rather like reading him by the sunlight of a summer's day, a light which casts deep shadows, gives play to glorious harmonies of colour, and shows all objects in vivid life and true relation."

To this may be added the following comparison, from the pen of Booth's son, the brilliant actor of our own day:

"They were so much alike in features, in manner, and in stature—although my father boasted of an inch above Kean in the latter particular, and in that only—that in the scene where Booth's brown hair and blue-gray eyes were disguised by the traditional black wig of

tragedy and by other stage accoutrements, he appeared to be the very counterpart of his black-eyed swarthy rival. Their voices were unlike—the latter's harsh and usually unpleasing to the ear, the former's musical and resonant. Their reading of the text was not the same. Kean was careless, and gave flashes of light after intervals of gloom. Booth was always even—a careful expounder of the text, a scholar, a student, and—but enough of comparisons; they were made *ad nauseam* long years ago, and belong to the written history of the London stage; they need have no admission here. Suffice it that the mere similitude stamped the second comer as an imitator, although he had never seen his predecessor. Kean said, and I believe him, that he had never seen Cooke act; nevertheless, many critics declared him to have been a copyist of the great George Frederick."

At this time of day it is impossible to decide exactly what degrees of excellence were reached by the two actors. Kean first, and Booth nowhere, is the accepted verdict, but Mr. Gould succeeds, I think, in shaking one's confidence in its truth. Certainly, that Booth at the age of twenty-one did not succeed in outshining Kean in the plenitude of his powers and of his fame would prove little, even if the attendant circumstances had not handicapped the younger player in the contest. He had appeared at Covent Garden as Richard III., and had been "boomed" in such a fashion as to prejudice the critics. But the Covent Garden managers, although they claimed that his performance had "met with a success unprecedented in the annals of histrionic fame," thought him adequately remunerated at £2 a week; and an astutely magnanimous proposal from Kean that his youthful rival should join him at Drury Lane at five times that salary lured him to the unequal duel in which he lost. On the 20th of February he played Iago at Drury Lane to Kean's Othello. Othello was, perhaps, Kean's greatest part,[1] and on this occasion he surpassed himself. Booth, his eyes opened to the *ruse* of which he had been the victim, returned to Covent Garden. In those days even

[1] Booth told his son that no mortal man could equal Kean in the rendering of Othello's despair and rage; and that, above all, his not very melodious voice in many passages, notably that ending with "farewell, Othello's occupation 's gone," sounded like the moan of ocean or the soughing of wind through cedars.

the leading actors were the slaves of the public, and the public was a hot-headed and violent master. For some nights he was not even permitted to apologize for what they regarded as his disloyalty to his Covent Garden patrons. At last he was forgiven. But the career, thus unluckily begun, was hardly calculated to be brilliant, and during the following eight years he ranked with Young and Macready, rather than with Kean.

In 1825 he left England for America, and here began a second and infinitely more successful career.[1] Of this the record of a "specimen day" must suffice. It is from the pen of Walt Whitman, and appeared in "The Boston Herald," August 16, 1885; Messrs. Brander Matthews and Laurence Hutton append it to the biographical sketch of Junius Brutus Booth in their "Actors and Actresses of Great Britain and the United States." It is pleasant to be able to count the lusty old poet among critics of the theatre.

"I happened to see what has been reckoned by experts one of the most marvellous pieces of acting ever known. It must have been about 1834 or '35. A favourite comedian and actress at the Bowery, Thomas Flynn and his wife, were to have a joint benefit, and securing Booth for Richard advertised the fact for many days beforehand. The house filled early from top to bottom. There was some uneasiness behind the scenes, for the afternoon arrived and Booth had not come from down in Maryland, where he lived. However, a few minutes before ringing up time he made his appearance in lively condition.

"After a one-act farce is over, as contrast and prelude, the curtain rises for the tragedy. I can (from my good seat in the pit, pretty well front) see again Booth's quiet entrance from the side, as with head bent he slowly walks down the stage to the footlights with that peculiar and abstracted gesture, musingly kicking his sword, which he holds off from him by its sash. Though fifty years have passed since then, I can hear the clank and feel the perfect hush of perhaps three thousand people waiting (I never saw an actor who could make more of the said hush, or wait, and hold the audience in an indescribably half delicious, half irritating suspense). And so throughout the entire play all parts—voice, atmosphere, magnetism, from

'Now is the winter of our discontent'

[1] His pre-eminence on the American stage was so undoubted that Mr. Gould entitles his monograph simply, "The Tragedian."



BOOTH AS "POSTHUMUS."

From an old engraving.

to the closing death fight with Richmond—were of the finest and grandest. . . . Especially was the dream scene very impressive. A shudder went through every nervous system in the audience; it certainly did through mine."

I cannot better conclude this chapter than with the following generous tribute to Edmund Kean, from the pen of Edwin Booth:

"As I gaze on the pitiable face of him, the waif, the reputed chick of Mother Carey, a stormy petrel indeed, but perhaps the first really great tragedian that trod the English stage; and at the same time recall my experiences with one of a similarly erratic brain, I am convinced that Kean's aberrations were constitutional and beyond his control. The blots in the 'scutcheon of genius, like spots on the sun, are to us, dim-eyed gropers in the vast mystery, incomprehensible, inscrutable. Who shall say that even our very evils, still existing in defiance of man's mightiest efforts to extirpate them, are not a part of the All-wise economy?

"Whilst pondering the ills of men like Edmund Kean, we must not forget the sacred precept: 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone.'"

CHAPTER VI

Macready

"Her love of acting was so great," says Macready of Mrs. Siddons's younger sister, Mrs. Whitlock—a lady of small talent and somewhat excessive bulk, who played heroines at sixty—"as to blind her to her disqualifications, and she has told me that when on the stage she felt like a being of another world! How often have I envied in others, less fortunate than myself in public favour, this passionate devotion to the stage! To me its drawbacks are ever present." This passage from his "Reminiscences" gives the keynote to Macready's attitude towards the theatre. It helps us to understand his faults as a manager and to reconcile them with his virtues as a man. He had taken to the stage unwillingly, and chafed throughout his life at the social disabilities that it involved. As appreciative as another of its delights, he could not endure its discomforts. "Whenever his foot touched the boards," as Mr. Archer expresses it in his life of the actor, "his self-respect, like Bob Acres' courage, began to ooze out at his finger-tips, and the great check upon his lower nature was removed." By disposition (what "Sentimental Tommy," in Mr. Barrie's story, was so little loth to grow into) a "magerful man," Macready, in his capacity as manager, wore no velvet glove. When his subordinates were at fault he tried—not always successfully—to be just, but he made no pretence to leniency. "No, sir," he replied to a young actor who had called him a tyrant, "No, sir, I am *not* a tyrant: I am a despot." In his bearing towards his colleagues he was too often unsympathetic, irritable, churlish. Needless to say, they did not like him. Once when he was absent from rehearsal on account of illness, the explanation was given that he had heart disease. "What!" exclaimed Mrs. Keeley, who was

standing by, "Macready suffering from heart disease—you might as well try to make me believe that ——[1] could suffer from brain fever!"

And yet Macready *had* a heart—a large, warm, good, generous heart. "He had an uncommon amount of sensibility," says Lady Pollock in "Macready as I Knew Him," "combined with a constant urgent desire to do good. This very desire, at war, perhaps, with the circumstances of his professional life, fretted him inwardly, and irritated a temper the violence of which was his only inheritance from his father." His "chivalrous spirit," his "domestic tenderness and social beneficence" justified, according to Harriet Martineau, the idolatry with which his friends regarded him. "I found Macready," wrote Robert Browning to Mr. Archer, "as I left him—and happily, after a long interval, resumed him, so to speak—one of the most admirable and indeed fascinating characters I have ever known; somewhat too sensitive for his own happiness, and much too impulsive for invariable consistency with his nobler moods." Reading the "Reminiscences" already referred to, one finds it easy to credit these three witnesses; yet in this "Portrait of the Artist" Macready has "painted in" the warts almost too conscientiously and uncompromisingly; he does himself less than justice: incidents illustrative of his kindliness and good nature, elsewhere recorded, find no mention; and he never attributes his failings of character, as his admirers have done, not without reason, to the nature of his career. He does not tell us that in his young days "he is represented to have been the best-tempered youth in the world—all life and gaiety." In any other calling his faults might have remained dormant; in many other callings his gifts must have raised him to eminence.

Macready was the son of an Irish country manager, whose pecuniary difficulties in 1809 made it necessary that the boy of sixteen, whom he had sent to Rugby and destined for the bar, should come to his assistance. It was at the Manchester Theatre that old Macready had become involved. Released

[1] An actor, still living, to whose intellect Mrs. Keeley's two-edged witticism does injustice.

from his responsibilities through the good offices of friends, and at a heavy sacrifice, he proceeded to Newcastle, where his company acted during the race week under the management of young William. In the following year, his father having got back to Birmingham, William Charles Macready made his *début* as an actor in the part of Romeo, and tasted for the first time the intoxication of applause. It acted like inspiration on him, he tells us, he "trod on air"; and when the curtain fell at the conclusion of the play and a lady asked him pleasantly, "Well, sir, how do you feel now?" he replied, with boyish frankness, "I feel as if I should like to act it all over again."

In the season of 1811-12 at Newcastle he played with Mrs. Siddons, who encouraged him warmly; and shortly afterwards at Leicester with Mrs. Jordan. The smooth course of Macready's apprenticeship as an actor has been succinctly indicated by his biographer. He did not, like Garrick, awake one morning to find himself monarch of the theatrical globe; but if we think of the early experiences of Kemble or Mrs. Siddons, Edmund Kean or Irving, we see how little cause he had to chide with fortune. He stepped at once into "the lead." "For four years he held the chief place in his father's companies, working hard indeed, and playing at least seventy-four parts, but always the best parts, in the repertory of the day. Then he passed two seasons at Bath, still successful and applauded; and from Bath to London was but a single step. He was spared the soulless drudgery in which so many actors have wasted their best years."

It was in 1816 that Macready reached the goal of the provincial actor's ambition, by securing an engagement in the capital. The manager of Covent Garden signed a five years' agreement with him by which he was to receive £16 a week for the first two seasons, £17 a week for the second two, and £18 for the last—far more favourable terms, it will be remembered, than those held out to Kean two years previously at Drury Lane.

Orestes in *The Distressed Mother*, a translation of Racine's *Andromaque*, was the first part he had to play. None of the leading *tragédiennes* being available at the moment, the part of

the "weeping widowed Andromache" was entrusted to Mrs. Glover, somewhat to Macready's consternation, for her reputation was that of being the best comic actress then upon the stage; and in addition she was, he heard, exceedingly—one ungallant critic says monstrously—fat!

Mrs. Glover's unsuitability notwithstanding, the performance of *The Distressed Mother* went off all right. "Well, my boy," said the manager cordially to the young actor when the curtain had fallen, "you have done capitally, and if you could carry a play along with such a cast, I don't know what you *can't* do." Hazlitt had not "the slightest hesitation in saying that Mr. Macready was by far the best tragic actor that had come out in his remembrance, with the exception of Mr. Kean." And Kean himself, "conspicuous in a private box," applauded loudly. But Macready's personal appearance evoked many unflattering comments. "One of the plainest and most awkwardly made men that ever trod the stage," the critic of "The News" describes him. "O Charles, *con quel viso!*" exclaimed John Philip Kemble with a smile when his brother, one of Macready's earliest appreciators, prophesied the new actor's success. "I'm told he is a capital actor, but a devilish ugly fellow!" Macready himself heard a neighbour in the pit remark once, about this time, "They say he 's an ugly likeness of Liston." This unanimity is convincing. Macready often refers to his unprepossessing appearance, sometimes with playful humour, as when he notes the receipt of a passionate love-letter from some unknown admirer, and comments that after this the ugly need never despair! It is curious to note how in later years his face improved, gradually moulded into impressiveness and dignity by the growth of character and the workings of intellect. Lady Pollock's description of him later on in life is worth quoting here. She is at a loss to explain how he could ever have been thought ugly. "Perhaps in his youth," she says, "he was somewhat puffy—I have heard so—but when I first saw him in his middle age, his face and figure showed little flesh, his jaw was square, there was a singular intensity in his eyes, he looked like a passionate thinking man, and his presence was commanding: you would hardly pass

him in the street without saying, 'Who can that be?' His first aspect was perhaps severe, but what a charm there is in a grave countenance when it breaks into a pleasant smile—a smile of humour or of kindness."

The course of Macready's life during the next two years may be most briefly indicated by a summary of the contents of the three or four chapters in which he himself records them—they are among the most interesting and characteristic in his "Reminiscences." They include an account of his performance as Gambia in a musical drama entitled *The Slave*, in which, "with black body, legs, and arms, short white cotton trunks, and coloured beads round arms, neck, and ankles," he had to vary "the broad and boisterous ostentation of tempestuous passion" (the words of "The Times") with the utterance of the finest sentiments in the noblest language; and a charming sketch of Miss Kitty Stephens, whose beautiful voice and fascinating personality had made her impersonation of the heroine one of the chief supports of the piece; a critical but conscientiously fair appreciation of Kemble's Cato at Covent Garden; a generous panegyric on Kean's Sir Edward Mortimer at Drury Lane; a description of Kean's victory over Booth in *Othello*, and of his own smaller triumph at Covent Garden in *The Conquest of Taranto*, in which his performance as the villain, Valentio, proved more effective than Booth's as the hero, Rinaldo. It is in these chapters, too, that he tells of his first acquaintance with Richard Lalor Sheil, of his appearance as Pescara in Sheil's *Apostate*, of Kemble's last night and Mrs. Siddons's reappearance for the occasion, of the visit to London of Talma, the great tragedian of France, of his own performance as Rob Roy, of his meeting with Lamb and Talfourd, and, finally, of Miss O'Neill's last performance in London.

The season of 1819-20 was perhaps the most important in Macready's life. On October 25th, 1819—having played eight or nine other *rôles* during the previous weeks, including Joseph Surface, Othello, Rob Roy, and Hotspur—he challenged comparison with Kean as Richard III. It was his first really great success. The audience was enthusiastic, and insisted on Macready's coming before the curtain—a practice

until then unknown. The papers next morning re-echoed the applause, and Macready, who had applied to himself the words

> "This is the night
> That either makes me or fordoes me quite,"

felt that he had now reached the "utmost round of the ladder." After a successful performance of Coriolanus, in which he had to measure himself against Kemble in that actor's favourite *rôle*, Macready's new fortunes took the tangible form of an engagement at Brighton at £50 a night. This was in December, 1819. In April, 1820, he received the manuscript of *Virginius* from a friend who was interested in the author, James Sheridan Knowles, at that time a school-master in Glasgow. He read it with unlooked-for delight, wrote Knowles an expansive letter which sent that impressionable Irishman into a delirium of happiness, and secured its acceptance forthwith by the manager of Covent Garden, where it was produced on May 7th with great success, Macready's impersonation of the title-*rôle* adding very considerably to his reputation.

The extraordinary impression made by *Virginius* upon the most brilliant intellects of the time is a curiosity of criticism. It was hailed, as I have said already, as the inauguration of a new epoch in the history of the drama, and Knowles woke the morning after its production to find himself "the first tragic writer of the age." Until then his friends had seen in him only the lovable, simple-minded, hot-tempered, eccentric "Paddy" Knowles, the idol of his Glasgow schoolboys—as delightful a dominie, surely, as Scotland ever knew: now, they found it difficult to give expression to their feelings of admiration. Charles Lamb, finding prose inadequate, dropped into poetry:

> "Twelve years ago I knew you, Knowles, and then
> Esteemed you a perfect specimen
> Of those fine spirits warm-souled Ireland sends
> To teach us colder English how a friend's
> Quick pulse should beat. I knew you brave and plain,
> Strong sensed, rough witted, above fear or gain;

But nothing further had the gift to espy.
Sudden you reappear—with wonder I
Hear my old friend (turned Shakespeare) read a scene
Only to *his* inferior in the clean
Passes of Pathos, with such fence-like art,
Ere we can see the steel 'tis in our heart."

Hazlitt, one of his earliest friends, but previously somewhat patronizing in his demeanour towards him, was hardly less impressed, though at a loss to reconcile his work with his personality:

"His most intimate friends see nothing in him by which they could trace the work to its author. The seeds of dramatic genius are contained and fostered in the warmth of the blood that flows in his veins; his heart dictates to his head. The most unconscious, the most unpretending, and the most artless of mortals, he instinctively obeys the impulse of natural feeling, and produces a perfect work of art. He has hardly read a poem or a play, or seen anything of the world, but he hears the anxious beatings of his own heart, and makes others feel them by the force of sympathy. Ignorant alike of rules, regardless of models, he follows the steps of truth and simplicity; and strength, proportion and delicacy, are the infallible results. By thinking of nothing but his subject he rivets the attention of the audience to it. All his dialogue tends to action; all his situations form classic groups. There is no doubt that *Virginius* is the best acting tragedy that has been produced on the modern stage."

Even Leigh Hunt is surprised into an utterance of sentimental emotion: "What a manly and sweet-natured play is this of Mr. Knowles's, and how well it moves the heart again after a lapse of years, like music that we have heard at home." Macready himself, to add one more tribute to this remarkable collection, was impelled, in his surprise at Murray's failure to jump at his offer of the text for publication in volume form, to pass from appreciation to prophecy. Murray's reader, he thinks, showed himself *impar sibi* on this occasion, and did not display the liberality and clearness of judgment ordinarily and justly ascribed to him: "For the star of Alfieri's genius looks pale on this subject before the lustre of that of Knowles, and so long as there is a stage and actors capable



MACREADY AS "VIRGINIUS."

From an engraving by Charles Picart, after the drawing by I. Jackson, R.A.

of representing the best feelings of our nature, so long will the pathos, the poetry, and passion of *Virginius* command the tears and applause of its audience."[1]

But posterity was to be on the side of Murray's reader. "Worse work of the past has lasted longer," is all that Professor Morley can bring himself to say for the dramatist in his introduction to *The Hunchback* and *The Love Chase* in Cassell's National Library, in which *Virginius* is not included, "than the plays of Sheridan Knowles are likely to last in the future." And during the five years 1893—1897, inclusive, *Virginius* succeeded in holding the boards for only two weeks.

A tour in France and Italy, performances as Brutus, Wolsey, King John, and Shylock, his first appearance as William Tell (in Knowles's drama)—one of his most notable creations; his break with Covent Garden and engagement at Drury Lane; and, finally, his marriage with a young actress named Miss Catherine Atkins, were the chief events of the next few years of his life.

The story of his love affair with Miss Atkins is worth retelling; Macready himself tells it at length in the first volume of his "Reminiscences." He had first seen her, as a pretty little girl of nine, in the Glasgow Theatre in 1815, on the night of his benefit. She had to act a child's part in a farce and did not know her words, having been sent on at very short notice. Not being aware of this, Macready scolded her on coming off the stage, which he was "afterwards sorry for, as it cost her many tears." Five years later he came upon her at Aberdeen,

[1] Knowles got his play published eventually, and dedicated it to Macready in a delightfully characteristic letter, withdrawn from later editions: "My dear Sir, what can I do less than dedicate this Tragedy to you? This is a question, which you cannot answer, but I can—I cannot do less; and if I could do more, I ought and would. I was a perfect stranger to you, and you read my play and at once committed yourself respecting its merits. This perhaps is not saying much for your head, but it says a great deal for your heart, and that is the consideration which, above all others, makes me feel happy and proud in subscribing myself your grateful friend and servant, James Sheridan Knowles." One can imagine Macready's expressive countenance when he read this ingenuous tribute.

where he was to appear as Richard III. She was the Prince of Wales, and on the following morning she came an hour before the general summons to rehearse with him as his Virginia in the play (*Virginius*) for that evening. He was much impressed by her charms—her "innocence and sensibility," her pretty and expressive face, and "the perfect symmetry of her sylph-like figure"; and at the end of the three weeks' tour, during which they acted together, he presented her with the handsomest shawl he could procure in Perth, and promised that she might always rely on finding in him a ready friend. They corresponded, and two years later, when her father and brother were drowned, Macready, who had indulged until then in the "pleasing dream" that his interest in her was "limited to a friendly and paternal solicitude for her welfare," awoke to the fact that she had won his heart. But the course of their true love was not to run smooth: there were rocks ahead, or rather a single sharp, angular rock, in the person of Miss Letitia Macready, the actor's devoted sister; and the lovers' bark was all but wrecked. There is something almost tragic in poor Macready's account of the first meeting of the two women. "Unmistakable disappointment, indeed repulsion, was expressed in my sister's look and manner as she took Catherine's hand. No word in consequence was exchanged between them. Disconcerted and distressed as I was, my endeavours to reason with one or console the other were alike unavailing. The day was one of the most wretched in my whole life. It was not possible to alter the plan determined on. We were obliged to go forward to Brighton, and my place in the carriage was between the two dearest beings in existence, alienated from each other, as I feared, by a demonstration of aversion, uncontrollable and too probably mutual. Arrived at the Clarence Hotel, Brighton, my sister retired to her room and lay till late in the afternoon on her bed, drowned in tears; my poor Catherine was in little better plight; whilst I, half distracted and bewildered in my endeavours at reconciliation, could be but a sorry comforter." But they both loved him, and they did not prove irreconcilable. The gentle Catherine "assented without murmur or reserve" to Miss Macready's



MACREADY AS "MACBETH."

From the painting (by Clint?) at the South Kensington Museum.

suggestion that she should qualify for the position of the tragedian's consort by continuing for a while her somewhat neglected education—she even suffered Miss Macready herself to lend a hand! Thus mollified, the actor's sister became resolutely amiable, and all ended happily. "It is but simple justice to her beloved memory," says Macready in his "Reminiscences," writing of his first wife some years after her death, "to repeat the truth that although, in a worldly sense, I might have formed a more advantageous connection, I could not have met with qualities to compare with the fond affection, the liveliness and simple worth that gave happiness to so many years of my life."

In 1826 Macready paid his first visit to America, and in 1828 came about his noteworthy engagement to act in Paris, at the Italian Opera House, where Edmund Kean and Charles Kemble had appeared on previous occasions. His Othello was received with almost embarrassing enthusiasm. Actors being forbidden in Paris to appear before the curtain to answer to applause, "about fifty of the audience jumped on the stage and encircled the tragedian, some threw their arms round his neck and almost smothered the renowned tragedian with kisses. However, the liberty taken with the actor carried its punishment with it, as the faces of these enthusiastic admirers bore visible signs to the delighted spectators that they had come in contact with the Moor!"

In 1832 Macready played for the first and only time with Edmund Kean—Iago to his Othello. There was a characteristic interchange of amenities, Macready referring to Kean as "that low man," Kean referring to Macready as "that ——." Historians leave us to fill up the blank for ourselves. In 1833 Kean died, and Macready, now the most prominent man in the profession, served as one of the pall-bearers at his funeral. Not liking Bunn, the manager, a sort of embryo Barnum, he quitted Drury Lane in 1834, but after a brief and unsuccessful attempt at theatrical managership on his own account at Bath and Bristol, he returned in the following year. But Bunn's ideas of management soon exasperated him again. The production of *Richard III.* in mutilated form, despite his protests,

was the immediate cause of an outbreak which he thus records in his diary for April 29th: "As I came off the stage, ending the third act of Richard, in passing by Bunn's door I opened it, and unfortunately he was there. I could not contain myself; I exclaimed: 'You damned scoundrel! how dare you use me in this manner?' And going up to him as he sat on the other side of the table, I struck him as he rose, a back-handed slap on the face." A fight ensued, in the course of which Bunn drew first blood by biting Macready's little finger! It was a sorry and squalid business altogether, and the recollection of it was a source of the deepest humiliation to the actor throughout his life; the £150 which he had to pay Bunn in compensation for his injuries was a trifle in comparison. But the public seems to have taken a lenient, even a sympathetic, view of the matter, and Macready's career, which for many years had lain in the "Doldrums," as Mr. Archer says in his biography—"a region of calms, squalls, and light baffling winds"—received a fresh impetus from his consequent migration to Covent Garden.

It was at Covent Garden, in May, 1836, a few weeks after the fight, that Macready appeared for the first time with two actresses whose careers were to be intimately associated with his: in *The Stranger* with Miss Helen Faucit (the Lady Martin of later years), and in Talfourd's *Ion* with Miss Ellen Tree, who afterwards married Charles Kean.

In 1837, the year of the Queen's accession, Macready ventured on the management of Covent Garden, opening in September with *The Winter's Tale.* It was still necessary, or at least profitable, to maintain a fourfold company at the great theatres, the dinner-hour being still early, the evenings long, and the playgoers' appetite for entertainment almost insatiable. For tragedy he engaged (among many others of note in those days but now forgotten) Miss Helen Faucit, Samuel Phelps, until then an actor in the provinces, James Anderson, who was to be seen at Drury Lane so late as 1872, and Mr. Henry Howe, who was so long a noted figure at the Lyceum, and who died so recently; for comedy, Mrs. Glover, Miss Priscilla Horton (afterwards Mrs. German Reed), and Tyrone Power,

Jack Johnston's successor in Irish *rôles;* in addition, he had a staff for English opera and a staff for pantomime. In his first three months he is said to have lost £3,000, a sum which he more than recovered by the pantomime! Bulwer's *Lady of Lyons*, his first new production, though it met with a doubtful reception, developed gradually into an immense success; then came a series of Shakespearean performances, followed by Byron's *Two Foscari* and Knowles's *Woman's Wit*, and his management ended brilliantly with Bulwer's *Richelieu*—an immediate triumph—and an elaborately beautiful production of *Henry V.*, in organizing which he had the co-operation of many of his most distinguished friends in literature and art.

A couple of years at the Haymarket, chiefly notable for the success of Bulwer's *Money*, came after, and then Macready undertook the management of Drury Lane. He began on Boxing Night, 1842, with *The Merchant of Venice*, followed by a Christmas pantomime. In February the production of Gay's *Acis and Galatea*, with Handel's music and scenery by Stanfield, proved extraordinarily popular; it was exquisitely staged. "Now I have *seen* a poem!" a lady said of it to Macready, greatly to his delight. In May he added to the company, which included the Keeleys and Compton among other comedians, Mrs. Nisbett (afterwards Lady Boothby), Madame Vestris, and Charles Mathews the Younger, whom she afterwards married. In 1842 he produced Marston's *Patrician Daughter*, and in 1843 Browning's *Blot in the 'Scutcheon*, in which however he did not appear himself, but left the principal *rôle* to Phelps. In June he relinquished the cares and troubles of managership for good.

Of the rest of Macready's theatrical life not much need be said. His appearance in his own adaptation of Sir Henry Taylor's *Philip Van Artevelde* at the Princess's in 1847; his benefit, "by Royal Command," at Drury Lane in July, 1848; and a memorable visit to America (to which I shall have to return) were its chief events. The last two years were devoted very largely to farewell performances in the provinces and in London. On February 26th, 1851, he appeared as Macbeth for the "last time for ever."

When he woke in the morning and remembered that this was to be the last day of his professional career, there was not one feeling of regret, he tells us, to qualify the satisfaction with which he said to himself, as he went through each necessary preparation for the evening performance, "I shall never have to do this again." In the theatre, as he listened to the shouts and cries of the crowd outside the doors waiting for admission, he contrasted his sense of comfort and security with the anxieties of former years, when his fortune and his children's weal were still at stake. He felt himself in the mood for great acting; and when the time came he acted his best, "with a reality, a vigour, a truth, a dignity," as he says himself—ever as frank in his self-praise as in his more frequent self-condemnation—"that I never before threw into this favourite character." When the curtain fell, and Macready, amid a scene of enthusiasm hardly equalled in the memory of the oldest playgoer, advanced to deliver his farewell, the thought that his children were present, and had seen him on the stage for the first and the last time, was uppermost in his mind, and for a moment overcame him. But he recovered his self-possession and stood waiting for the applause to cease. The scene still lives for us in this description by George Henry Lewes:

"... And what a sight that was! How glorious, triumphant, affecting, to see everyone starting up, waving hats and handkerchiefs, stamping, shouting, yelling their friendship at the great actor, who now made his appearance on that stage where he was never more to reappear. There was a crescendo of excitement enough to have overpowered the nerves of the most self-possessed, and when after an energetic fight—which showed that the actor's powers bore him gallantly up to the last—he fell pierced by Macduff's sword, this death, typical of the actor's death, this last look, this last act of the actor struck every bosom with a sharp and sudden blow, loosening a tempest of tumultuous feeling such as made applause an ovation.

"Some little time was suffered to elapse wherein we recovered from the excitement, and were ready again to burst forth as Macready, the man, dressed in his plain black, came forward to bid 'Farewell, a long farewell to all his greatness.' As he stood there, calm but sad, waiting till the thunderous reverberations of applause should be hushed, there

was one little thing which brought tears into my eyes, viz., the crape hat-band and black cuffs that seemed to me more mournful and more touching than all this vast display of sympathy; it made me forget the paint and tinsel, the artifice and glare of an actor's life, to remember how thoroughly the actor was a man—one of us, sharer in all we have known or must know. . . . Perhaps a less deliberate speech would have better suited the occasion; . . . but under such trying circumstances a man may naturally be afraid to trust himself to the inspiration of the moment. Altogether, I must praise Macready for the dignity with which he retired, and am glad that he did not *act*. There was no ostentation of cambric sorrow; there was no well-got-up broken voice to simulate emotion. The manner was calm, grave, sad and dignified."

A great public dinner followed on March 1. Sir E. L. Bulwer took the chair, and the list of stewards included the names of Samuel Rogers, Tennyson, Macaulay, Monckton Milnes, Kinglake, Douglas Jerrold, and Delane, the editor of "The Times." One is not too much impressed as a rule by after-dinner panegyrics, and Bulwer's name is not a synonym for sincerity, but there is a genuine ring about the eloquent periods of his speech from the chair. He laid stress particularly upon Macready's services to dramatic literature by the encouragement of new talent and by his impersonations of Tell and Virginius and Ion. "And what charm and what grace, not their own," the speaker continued, "he has given to the lesser works of an inferior writer it is not for me to say." He referred also to certain practical reforms at Drury Lane by which a disorderly section of the audience had been got rid of during Macready's management. "For the first time," he said, "since the reign of Charles II., a father might have taken his daughter to the theatre with as much safety as if he had taken her to the house of a friend."

"Macready," Mr. Lawrence Barrett has remarked, "dearly loved a lord.' . . . Like Congreve before him, he had a snob's contempt for his art, and was more proud of his social position than of his reputation as an actor." The first part of this judgment is, I think, unjust. Macready's personality brought him almost inevitably into contact with the great, and he could not but prefer their conversation to the trivial and petty "shop" of the green room. But for lords as lords he seems to

have cared nothing. For the second part of it there is more foundation, and when Bulwer proceeded to give forth the axiom, "Let a man but honour his calling and the calling will soon be the honour of the man," Macready's conscience must have felt a twinge.

He did honour his calling, indeed, but he honoured it half-heartedly, ever painfully conscious, as he himself said, of its drawbacks. Perhaps he deserves all the more credit for striving so arduously for its improvement, unsustained by that enthusiasm which sees no difficulties. The actor who honestly imagines that his art is the loftiest of all, and thinks of literature and painting and music as its handmaidens, can hardly fail to carry himself bravely. For Macready it was more difficult. Yet, listen to what Tennyson could say of him in a sonnet composed specially for the occasion of this banquet, and read at it by John Forster:

"Farewell, Macready, since to-night we part,
Full-handed thunders often have confest
Thy power, well used to move the public breast.
We thank thee with one voice and from the heart.
Farewell, Macready, since this night we part.
Go take thy honours home; rank with the best;
Garrick, and statelier Kemble, and the rest,
Who made a nation purer thro' their art.
Thine is it that the drama did not die,
Nor flicker down to brainless pantomime
And those gilt gauds men-children swarm to see.
Farewell, Macready; moral, grave, sublime,
Our Shakespeare's bland and universal eye
Dwells pleased thro' twice a hundred years on thee."

I may conclude this account of Macready's stage career by quoting from his diary the passage in which he himself sums up its results:

"I have acquitted myself of my dues—I am free! Nearly fifty-eight years of my life are numbered: that life was begun in a very mediocre position—mere respectability; . . . I have attained the loftiest position in the art to which my destiny directed me, have gained the respect of the honoured and respected, and the friendship



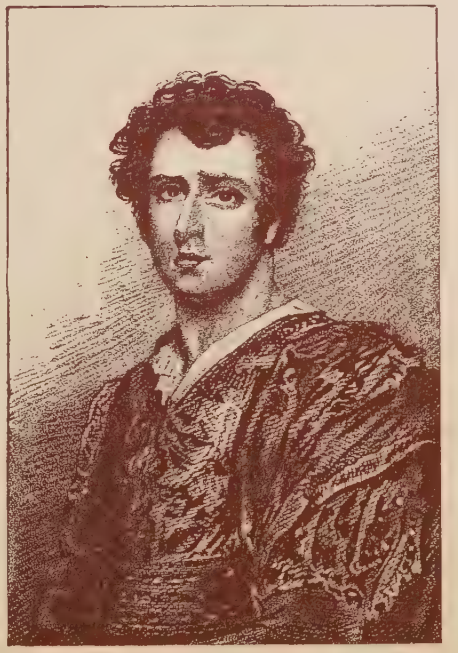
STEPHEN KEMBLE AS "FALSTAFF."



FAWCETT AS "TOUCHSTONE."



MACREADY AS "KING JOHN."



JAMES WALLACK AS "CHARALOIS."

FROM OXBERRY'S "DRAMATIC BIOGRAPHY."

of the highly-gifted, amiable, and distinguished. My education, my habits, my turn of mind did not suggest to me the thought of amassing wealth, or I might have been rich; I have what I trust will prove competence, and most grateful am I for its possession. My home is one of comfort and of love, and I look towards it with cheerfulness and delightful security of heart, and most gratefully and earnestly do I bless the name and thank the bounty of Almighty God, who has vouchsafed such an indulgence to me, undeserving as I have been, and sinner as I am. Blessed be His name. Amen."

On his retirement he betook himself to Sherborne, in Dorset, where he had purchased a pleasant and spacious house. There he devoted himself almost exclusively, Sir Frederick Pollock tells us, "to labours of kindness and usefulness; his charity was so extensive that, although his left hand knew not what his right hand did, it was impossible that it should escape observation even beyond the sphere of the recipients of his bounty; and while thus engaged in relieving distress in the neighbourhood of his new home, he continued to remit money to old pensioners elsewhere up to the day of his death. He would himself visit the sick and poor, and ascertain their necessities, and if he thought they were not sufficiently cared for he would send to them his own medical attendant." But it was to the establishment and conduct of a night school that he devoted himself most of all. "The best evening school which I have seen," says the Rev. W. R. Brookfield, in an official report as Inspector of Schools, "is that at Sherborne, managed and in great measure taught by Mr. W. C. Macready. . . . It was attended by upwards of eighty youths, of ages varying from ten to twenty years, but averaging thirteen, and all engaged till evening in laborious employments." And he proceeds to enlarge upon the impressive sight of the veteran tragedian, accustomed to the plaudits and admiration of the great world, quietly engaged in teaching the children of Dorsetshire labourers. "I have met with many sermons, pamphlets, orations," he concludes, "on the duty of instructing the poor, but here was a homily in action which I congratulate myself on having witnessed."

In 1852 Macready lost his wife. Eight years later he married

again, and quitted Sherborne for Cheltenham. His closing years were saddened by the deaths of several of his children, but his second wife was as devoted to him as his first, and he was fortunate in the possession of affectionate friends—Dickens above all. "Charles Dickens, I had almost embraced you—What a friend you have been!" Catherine Macready had cried out to the novelist from her death-bed. Now, once again, he was to show himself at his best—"the good, the gentle, all-accomplished, ever friendly, noble Dickens" of Carlyle's panegyric. "In the later days of Macready's life," says Lady Pollock, "when the weight of time and of sorrow pressed him down, Dickens was his most frequent visitor; he cheered him with narratives of bygone days; he poured some of his own abundant warmth into his heart; he led him into new channels of thought; he gave readings to rouse his interest; he waked up in him again by his vivid descriptions his sense of humour; he conjured back his smile and his laugh—Charles Dickens was and is to me the ideal of friendship."

A remark once made about Macready's Hamlet brings out better than any more detailed description of his acting his distinctive position in the ranks of great tragedians. The speaker was James Spedding (the editor of Bacon), and Lady Pollock was present. Some one had observed that Macready's vigorous frame told against him in the *rôle*. "It may be so," was the reply, "but on the other hand, an advantage attaches to him I have observed in no other Hamlet: it is easy to credit him with the thoughts he utters."

This, of course, is far from telling the whole secret of his success. The most intellectual of British actors, as Westland Marston calls him, he was much more besides. His impressionable temperament, his mobile countenance, "a gift of expressing states of feeling by gesture and attitude which rose in him to a special endowment," a voice of great resonance and beauty, and that best substitute for genius, the faculty of taking infinite pains, all these attributes helped to raise him head and shoulders above his contemporaries. He was not a versatile actor, but he achieved success in comedy as well as in tragedy

and in melodrama. There were critics, indeed, who would have it that he was merely a melodramatic actor and no tragedian, but this was absurd. "He was by nature unfitted for some great tragic parts," says George Henry Lewes, "but by his intelligence he was fitted to conceive, and by his organization fitted to express *characters*, and was not like a melodramatic actor limited to *situations*. Surely Lear, King John, Richard III., Cassius, and Iago are tragic parts! In these he was great."

In comedy his Benedick was perhaps his greatest hit. "In this part his spontaneous humour," says Westland Marston, "aroused the house to such shouts of laughter, one might have thought Keeley, not Macready, was on the stage." In characters of an airier type—Mercutio, for instance, of which lightness is the essence—he was less successful.

In "Macready as I Knew Him," Lady Pollock describes, with much sympathetic art, some of the actor's most notable performances—his Lear, his Hamlet, his Macbeth, his Iago, his Claude Melnotte, his Richelieu, his Benedick. For these appreciations I must refer you to her own pleasant pages. Here I may avail myself of the single passage in which she seeks to sum up Macready's special characteristics as a tragedian. She has quoted the saying of a French critic, that whereas Kemble's style was the classical and Kean's the natural, Macready's was "natural, classical, or romantic, according to the part he sustained."

> "He was indeed an essentially original actor; he was gifted by nature with a temperament singularly sensitive and imaginative; and it was in passages of profound sorrow, of concentrated solemn passion, that his great strength lay: the tones of suffering, between resignation and despair, the last utterances of a broken heart, were expressed by him so that the impression they made upon the hearer became a part of his future existence."

So much for the Macready that was. In taking leave of him, one finds oneself speculating as to the Macready that might have been: Macready, Head Master of his own Rugby —Macready, Speaker of the House of Commons—Macready, Archbishop of Canterbury?

CHAPTER VII

Macready's Contemporaries

"Macready's Leading Ladies" I might almost entitle this chapter, for, with a few exceptions, his male contemporaries were not of much account. Liston, who acted until 1850, I have already dealt with. Keeley and Compton will come more fitly in a later chapter. James Anderson and John Ryder—pale reflections of Macready himself—hardly call for notice in so rapid a survey of the stage. There remain only John Vandenhoff, Tyrone Power, Edwin Forrest, and James Wallack.

Of the succession of brilliant actresses who played heroine to Macready's hero (many of them to the hero of Kean and the Kembles as well), Mrs. Glover, the too ample Andromache of 1816, will naturally come first. She seems to have been a pleasant body, a comely, merry, kindly-natured Irishwoman, cursed with a brutal father, who beat her, appropriated her earnings, and forced her into a distasteful marriage with a man who had offered him a bonus of £1,000 for his services in the transaction. Her personal appearance in the 'Twenties is thus described: "Considerably above the middle size, her eyes are blue, with eye-lashes that exquisitely adorn the beams they darken, her complexion is beautifully fair, though her hair is dark; her features are small and extremely pretty, though not calculated for forcible expression. Five and twenty years since she was one of the most lovely creatures we ever beheld, and now she is what is generally termed a 'remarkably fine woman.'"

The same writer, a contributor to Oxberry's "Dramatic Biography"—an organ somewhat addicted as a rule to scandal-mongering concerning the lives of players—is not less



MRS. GLOVER.

From an engraving, dated 1818.

enthusiastic over her moral qualities. "If charity, unaffected goodness of heart, an eye for pity, a hand for want, a voice whose accents seldom utter even reproof to and never reproaches against her worst foes, a disposition whose sweetness is the theme even of her enemies, entitle a being to our praise, then may we safely say Mrs. Glover is a good woman and an honour to human nature." She had made her first appearance in 1797. Her early ambitions (like Lady Bancroft's) had been in the direction of tragedy, but nature had destined her to comedy. In her lifetime she played many parts: "From the Prince Arthurs and Tom Thumbs of her childhood she proceeded to the girlish heroines of theatrical romance; later she represented vivacious matrons and buxom widows; finally she subsided into the old ladies, the nurses, the dowagers and duennas." But her most notable achievement was her performance of Hamlet! It is thus referred to by Mr. Donaldson in his volume of reminiscences. "Her noble figure, handsome and expressive face, and rich powerful voice, all contributed to rivet the attention of the *élite* assembled on this occasion, while continued bursts of applause greeted her finished elocution as she delivered the soliloquies so well known to her delighted auditors. . . . At the end of the first act, Kean came behind the scenes and shook Mrs. Glover, not by one, but by both hands, and exclaimed, 'Excellent! excellent!' 'Away, you flatterer!' replied the actress, smiling: 'you come in mockery, to scorn and scoff at our solemnity!'" Mr. Dutton Cook saw her in 1846 at the Haymarket, then under the management of Benjamin Webster. She was "large of person" at this time, "but to no unwieldy extent." She had still some remains of beauty. "The ringing distinctness of her tone, her prompt and voluble utterance, her vivacity of action, told irresistibly upon the house." She retired in 1850, her benefit at Drury Lane taking place under special patronage of the Queen.

Like Mrs. Glover, Miss O'Neill was an Irishwoman; but their personalities were as different as their careers.

The retirement of Mrs. Siddons, and the failure of all the many efforts to replace her, had combined with Kean's triumphs

at the rival theatre, to leave Covent Garden in dire straits. This was the opportunity of the charming young actress whom Kemble engaged in Dublin in 1814 and brought back with him to London. She was of lowly extraction, had run barefoot as a child in the streets of Drogheda, but natural talents and a fair education had fitted her for appearance even in the highest forms of the drama; even her brogue, noticeable in conversation, she was able to restrain upon the stage. Her *début* as Juliet on December 6th, in 1814, was one of the most successful ever known. It aroused Macready's "enthusiastic admiration," expressed in two pages of his "Reminiscences." Here is Leigh Hunt's impression of her—somewhat cold-blooded, as was his wont, but more in keeping with the impression we get from her painted portraits, it must be admitted, than the unrestrained eulogies of more impressionable writers:

"Miss O'Neill, more than any late actress, reminded us in certain passages, and in a faint degree, of Mrs. Siddons. This young lady, who will probably become a favourite with the public, is rather tall; and though not *of the first order of fine forms*, her figure is of that respectable kind which will not interfere with the characters she represents. Her deportment is not particularly graceful: there is a heaviness and want of firmness about it. Her features are regular, and the upper part of her face finely expressive of terror or sorrow. It has that mixture of beauty and passion which we admire so much in some of the antique statues. The lower part of her face is not equally good. From a want of fullness or flexibility about the mouth, her laugh is not at any time pleasing, and where it is a laugh of terror, is distorted and painful. Her voice, without being musical, is distinct, powerful, and capable of every necessary exertion. Her action is impressive and simple. She looks the part she has to perform, and fills up the pauses in the words by the varied expression of her countenance or gestures, without anything pointed or far-fetched."

Hazlitt gives the following description of her histrionic methods in an essay in which he contrasts them with the violence and unevenness of Kean's:

"Her excellence consisted in truth of nature and force of passion. . . . She seemed perfect mistress of her own thoughts, and if she was

not indeed the rightful queen of tragedy, she had at least all the decorum, grace, and self-possession of one of the maids of honour waiting around its throne. Miss O'Neill might have played to the greatest advantage in one of the tragedies of Sophocles, which are the perfection of the stately, elegant, and simple drama of the Greeks. . . . Her Belvidera, Isabella, Mrs. Beverley, etc., were all characters of this strictly feminine type of heroine—made of softness and suffering."

Juliet perhaps was her best performance, Lady Teazle her worst. "It was a complete failure," Hazlitt tells us. "It was not comic; it was not elegant; it was not dignified; it was not playful; it was not anything it ought to be." There were other characters in which she did not shine, but on the whole her career was singularly successful. She is stated to have never made less than £12,000 a year while on the London stage, and when she married Mr. (afterwards Sir Wrixon) Becher, M.P. for Mallow, in 1819, to have amassed a sum of £30,000, which she distributed among her family.

Miss O'Neill possessed one great gift not common to actresses, the power, namely, of "abundant weeping without disfigurement." She was characterized, says Miss Fanny Kemble in her "Records of a Girlhood," by an "easily excited superficial sensibility, which caused her to cry, as she once said to me, buckets full, and enabled her to exercise the (to most men) irresistible influence of a beautiful woman in tears."[1]

Her charm of countenance seems to have fled with her youth. "A thin, elegant-looking lady," she is described in 1836 by one who knew her then, "but with no beauty, save the indescribable beauty of goodness." She died in 1872 in her eighty-second year.

The efforts to replace Miss O'Neill were almost as many and almost as fruitless as had been the efforts to replace Mrs. Siddons. Perhaps the most notable of her would-be

[1] In view of all the innumerable tributes to Miss O'Neill's *beauty*, as distinguished from mere attractiveness, one is inclined to disregard the evidence of her portraits, especially of that in the National Portrait Gallery; there must surely have been some charm of expression in her face, lost in these somewhat insipid representations. One may disregard them, indeed, with the less hesitation, that they bear but little resemblance to each other.

successors was Miss Smithson. Miss Smithson's career was a most curious one. Mr. Dutton Cook has devoted a sympathetic chapter to it in his "Hours with the Players." For six years she had been little more than a "walking lady" at Drury Lane (whither she had been brought from her native Ireland), when, in 1828, she accompanied Macready on his visit to Paris. She was graceful and beautiful, but, as English critics thought, without talent. In Paris she became the rage. She was known there as *la belle Smidson*, and her Christian name, Harriet, was translated into its French equivalent—which has something in its sound more tender and caressing—Henriette. The Parisians raved about her "tall and noble" person, and discovered too that she had "fire and a splendid voice." She brought more money into her manager's pocket than either Kean or Charles Kemble had done on previous visits, and now she quite outshone Macready, the star of the company. But, alas! she was only a rocket, and her fall from fortune was scarcely less rapid than her rise. Berlioz, the composer, whom she married, proved an unsatisfactory kind of husband, though as a romantic lover he had left nothing to be desired; and she died in sorrow and solitude. To her widower, who had been sentimentalizing over her death, though for many years they had lived apart, the Abbé Liszt sent these memorable words of comfort, accepted doubtless in the same sublime spirit in which they were offered: "Elle t'inspira, tu l'as aimée, tu l'as chantée: sa tâche était accomplie." She had ministered to the comfort of an egoist of genius. "Her task was accomplished." Poor Henriette!

Miss Frances Maria Kelly, a more famous actress, Miss Smithson's senior by ten years, was another would-be successor to Miss O'Neill. She also was Irish, as her name suggests, and a niece of Michael Kelly, a popular playwright of last century. She made her first appearance at the age of seven in an opera entitled *Bluebeard*, by her uncle, produced at Drury Lane under John Kemble's management in 1798. As Prince Arthur in *King John*, in 1800, she won the admiration of Mrs. Siddons (who was the Constance), and of Fox



MME. VESTRIS.



MISS MELLON.



MISS O'NEILL.



MISS SMITHSON.

FROM OXBERRY'S "DRAMATIC BIOGRAPHY."

and Sheridan. In all, she acted at Drury Lane (with frequent visits to the other theatres) for thirty-six years, appearing as many of Shakespeare's heroines (as Ophelia, on many occasions, to the Hamlet of Edmund Kean, whose playmate she had been as a child), in nearly all the leading comedy characters in the British drama, and in many melodramatic *rôles* as well. Having taken farewell of the stage in 1835, she founded a dramatic school soon afterwards in Dean Street, Soho, spurred thereto by the censorious reflections upon the condition of her profession which she had read in the article upon Actresses in "The Encyclopædia Britannica." This school prospered at first, and presently she built the Royalty Theatre with a view to exploiting the dramatic talent she had been the means of fostering. In 1840 she opened it as a regular theatre; but now fortune went against her, and in a few more years all her earnings—£16,000, it is said—had been dissipated. In 1850 she retired, and she lived in reduced circumstances until 1882, when she died. Shortly before her death she confided to Mr. Charles Kent (as he mentions in his notice of her in "The Dictionary of National Biography") the very interesting fact that Charles Lamb proposed to her, and that she would have married him but for the strain of madness in his family. It seems a pity! Imagine Lamb thus wedded, and with sons and daughters! What a heritage of charm and fun and genius had been theirs!

It is curious to note what a number of the prominent actresses of the beginning of the century married men of rank and distinction; nowadays, when the general status of the theatrical profession is so much higher, it is chiefly among the more youthful and less intellectual lordlings that the stage makes its conquests. Doubtless the belles of Bloomsbury and Belgravia were more easily outshone in wit and gaiety and originality than are their more accomplished granddaughters of Mayfair; and the demand for clever wives in Society proper exceeded the supply. The case of Mrs. Nisbett, another charmer of those days, prompts these reflections. Her first husband was Captain John Alexander Nisbett, of Bretten-

ham Hall, Suffolk, an officer in the Life Guards; and her second, Sir William Boothby, of Ashbourne Hall, Derbyshire. A woman of many attractions, she owed perhaps most of her success to the music and infectiousness of her laugh. In her laugh, as in most of her histrionic qualities, she seems to have resembled Mrs. Jordan more than any other actress of her time. Their gifts and achievements are often compared. Here, from Mr. Westland Marston's "Our Old Actors," is a pleasant sketch of her personality upon the stage:

"Her Rosalind was much like her Beatrice. Gay, mischievous, it carried one away by its exhilarating animal spirits, which never sank into coarseness; but of that higher and tenderer side which Helen Faucit so charmingly revealed, and which made the very buoyancy of the character spring from its purity of feeling, she had scarcely a glimpse. She was a whimsical, brilliant, tantalizing, charming Lady Teazle, without much depth in her repentance; and she was the best Helen in *The Hunchback* I ever saw. . . . The reader now and then may have seen a Helen whom any bachelor of taste would have tolerated as a romp but avoided as a wife. With Mrs. Nisbett, however, there was so much impulse in the raillery of her cousin Modus, . . . so dancing a light in the eye, and such a just perception of the point to which she might go, and still be womanly, that nothing was too set in intention or greatly too bold in manner. The character, however, in which Mrs. Nisbett won her chief triumph was undoubtedly that of Constance, in Sheridan Knowles's *Love-Chase*. In her sprightly jests on the overwhelmed Wildrake, what delightful mischief; in the picture of the chase with which she enchanted him, what humour, animation, and enjoyment!"

She appeared for the last time in 1851, having returned to the stage in 1847, after Sir William Boothby's death. She died in 1888.

There seems a certain incongruity in the association of Macready, the grave and sober scholar, with the youth and beauty, the liveliness and sparkle, of these actresses of his time. He has more in common with the three others I have yet to speak of, Miss Fanny Kemble, Miss Charlotte Cushman, and Miss Helen Faucit.

Miss Fanny Kemble, it is true, possessed all these qualities

which seem to harmonize so little with the tragedian's sombre respectability; but she was, in addition, a woman of intellect, and, like Macready himself, she was given to rueful meditation over the disadvantages of her calling. In her "Records of a Girlhood" she devotes a number of pages to heart-searchings upon the subject. This brilliant book is another bond in common with Macready, whose autobiography it rivals in its frank spirit of self-revelation. It has struck, and always will strike, different readers in different ways. It reflects, indeed, a score of different moods: it is a mixture, as "The Athenæum" said (in reviewing Halliburton's "Letter Bag of the Great Western," in which it was parodied), of "cleverness and audacity, refinement and coarseness, modesty and bounce, pretty humility and prettier arrogance." But whereas to most people its general tone must seem good-natured enough, to fanatical adherents of the theatre it has given dire offence.

When reading its bright and witty pages, I marked a number of passages which I was tempted to reproduce here for the entertainment of my readers, but space is limited, and most of them must be sacrificed; I must be content to transcribe one—an excellent example of the writer's skill in amusing portraiture. It is a description of her aunt, Mrs. Whitlock, that younger sister of Mrs. Siddons already referred to. She deserves a place, if only as a foil, in any record of the players of the period.

"She was a larger and taller woman than Mrs. Siddons, and had a fine commanding figure at the time I am speaking of, when she was quite an elderly person. She was like her brother Stephen in face, with handsome features, too large and strongly marked for a woman, light gray eyes, and a light auburn wig, which, I presume, represented the colour of her previous hair, and which, together with the tall cap that surmounted it, was always more or less on one side. She had the deep sonorous voice and extremely distinct utterance of her family, and an extraordinary vehemence of gesture and expression—quite unlike their quiet dignity and reserve of manner—which made her conversation like that of people in old plays and novels, for she would slap her thigh in emphatic enforcement of her statements (which were apt to be upon an incredibly large scale), not infrequently prefacing

them with the exclamation, 'I declare to God!' or 'I wish I may die!' all which seemed to us very extraordinary, and, combined with her large size and loud voice, used occasionally to cause dismay. My father used to call her Queen Bess (her name was Elizabeth), declaring that her manners were like those of that royal un-gentlewoman. But she was a simple-minded, sweet-tempered woman, whose harmless peculiarities did not prevent us all from being fond of her. . . . Nothing could be droller than to see her with Mrs. Siddons, of whom she looked like a clumsy, badly-finished imitation. Her vehement gestures and violent objurgations contrasted comically with her sister's majestic stillness of manner; and when occasionally Mrs. Siddons would interrupt her with 'Elizabeth, your wig is on one side,' and the other replied, 'Oh, is it?' and giving the offending headgear a shove, put it quite as crooked in the other direction, and proceeded with her discourse, Melpomene herself used to have recourse to her snuff-box to hide the dawning smile on her face."

One of the most interesting chapters in the book is that in which she tells of Sir Thomas Lawrence's relations with her family, and of her own interviews with him while he was engaged upon the charming portrait here reproduced. This portrait, though a good likeness of her at her very best—"like what those who love me have sometimes seen me," as she herself expresses it—gives a wrong impression of her as she was known to the public during the three years of her early stage career. In the first place, *littleness*, so to speak, was her chief feature; in her beauty, as in her style of acting, she suggested the idea of Mrs. Siddons seen through the wrong end of an opera-glass: and the effect of this picture was, as she says, "much too large" for her—a characteristic of all Lawrence's portraits that robs them of some of their value. In the second place, she had been slightly disfigured by small-pox, owing to her mother's disbelief in vaccination. She had come back from her school in Paris, "a very pretty-looking girl" of sixteen, "with fine eyes, teeth and hair, a clear vivid complexion and rather good features," and was on a visit to London, when her mother made her come to Weybridge, where they had their home, for the express purpose of catching the milder disease of varioloid from her elder sister, who had been attacked by it! This, Mrs. Charles Kemble believed, was calculated to serve more effectually the purposes of

MISS FANNY KEMBLE.

From a lithograph by Richard J. Lane, A.R.A., after a drawing by Sir Thomas Lawrence, P.R.A.





HELEN FAUCIT (LADY MARTIN).

From the painting by Rudolf Lehmann.

vaccination. But in Fanny Kemble's case the experiment was a dismal failure, and the bright complexion was soon dulled and the delicate features made coarse and heavy.

Fanny Kemble was in many ways a woman in advance of her time. Many of the pages of this book of hers remind one by their modernity, no less than by their vivacity and wit, of Mrs. Crawford's Paris letters to "Truth" and "The Daily News." She was obliged to act in the old-fashioned plays in which Mrs. Siddons had moved the playgoers of a previous generation, but she was fully alive to their feebleness and absurdity. Belvidera, the *rôle* in which Mrs. Siddons had won the affections of Miss Boyle, she describes in a letter to a friend as "a sort of lay figure in a tragic attitude, a mere 'female in general,' without any peculiar or specific characteristics whatever"; Euphrasia in *The Grecian Daughter* she laughs at in similar vein; and there are a score of other references to plays and characters, still popular at the time, not merely with playgoers generally, but with leading critics as well, which she discusses and dismisses in true *fin de siècle* spirit. In acting Shakespeare's heroines, on the contrary, she seems to have experienced the kind of exquisite pleasure that was attributed so groundlessly to the fair, phlegmatic Fotheringay; Juliet and Portia were her favourites. It was as Juliet she made her *début* at Covent Garden in 1829, her mother (a very clever and charming woman, who had been on the stage but had left it some years before) reappearing for the occasion, and her father, hitherto invariably the Romeo, embodying for the first time what was to prove his best character, Mercutio. Her performance was a great success, and Charles Kemble's financial embarrassments, which were the immediate *raison d'être* of the experiment—for Fanny Kemble had not intended to go upon the stage at all—were soon disposed of: she succeeded, in fact, in doing for Covent Garden what Kean, fifteen years earlier, had done for Drury Lane.

In 1832 she accompanied her father to the United States, where in the following year she became the wife of Mr. Pierce Butler, a Southern planter. The marriage proved unhappy, and in 1847 she reappeared upon the English

Stage. In 1848, having secured a divorce from her husband, she began a new and brilliant career as a Shakespearean reader, to be resumed after a retirement of some twenty years, with little diminution of success.

Miss Charlotte Cushman, the first American tragic actress of real note, has been described as a feminine counterpart of Macready, so closely did she resemble him, not merely in histrionic gifts and characteristics, but in form and feature as well. Born at Boston in 1816, she made her first appearance in her native city in 1835. It was not until 1844, when she acted with the English tragedian during his tour in the States, that she came really to the front. "She has to learn her art," says Macready of her in his Diary, after playing with her in *Macbeth*, "but she showed mind, and sympathy with me." Some years later he paid her a far higher tribute. In playing Macbeth to her Lady Macbeth he felt himself, he said, to be "of less than secondary importance—in truth a mere thing of naught." It was to Macready's influence and encouragement that she herself attributed her success upon the stage. Her masculine physique, while it did not prevent her from achieving great popularity as many of Shakespeare's heroines, enabled her to excel also in a number of male characters—as Romeo, as Hamlet, as Claud Melnotte and — as Cardinal Wolsey! But her one great triumph was as Meg Merrilies in *Guy Mannering*. A dozen enthusiastic descriptions of it are to be found in theatrical reminiscences and records. Mr. Barton Baker's is one of the best:

"Wonderful as it was, the Meg Merrilies of Miss Cushman, however, bore no more resemblance to Scott's old crone than did the witches of Shakespeare to the wretched old hags that Scotch James persecuted. The Meg of Charlotte Cushman was a sibyl, a pythoness, before whose oracular utterances the boldest might have trembled. What a thrill went through the audience as she suddenly darted from the side scene and then stood motionless, with one claw-like finger of a skeleton hand pointed at Henry Bertram. What a face!—blanched and tanned and wrinkled and scarred, as it were, by the storms of centuries; bleareyed, with Medusa-like gray locks straggling from beneath a kind of turban, while the tall, bony figure was clad in a mass of indescribable

rags, shreds, patches of all colours, marvellously real. Who that ever heard it can forget her delivery of the prophecy, more especially of the last two lines—

> 'Till Bertram's might and Bertram's right
> Shall meet on Ellangowan's height'

—the tall weird figure on tiptoe, the withered arms thrown up, the deep rough voice rising to the shriek of a bird of prey upon the final words —it was not mere acting, it was an inspiration as great as anything Rachel ever achieved."

But Miss Cushman did not herself place much value on her performance as Meg Merrilies, probably because she felt that the stage version of *Guy Mannering* was little better than a melodrama. "Yes," she said one day to Westland Marston, "with an outlandish dress and a trick or two I can bring much more money to the theatre than when I give the public my heart's blood in my finest characters." [1]

The career of Miss Helen Faucit, begun in 1836, and ended, practically, in 1851, when she married Sir Theodore Martin, is, perhaps, the most notable, taking it as a whole, of any English actress since Mrs. Siddons. The original representative of the heroines in *The Lady of Lyons*, *Money*, *Richelieu*, and the *Duchesse de la Vallière*, and in Browning's *Strafford* and *Blot in the 'Scutcheon*, and in many other plays by dramatists of less importance, she won a still higher fame by her Shakespearean impersonations—Juliet, Beatrice, Constance, Imogen, Cordelia, Hermione, Desdemona, Portia, Rosalind, and Lady Macbeth. She was not beautiful—indeed, in the few old photographs of her that still exist, her features seem plain and rugged; yet, unlike Miss Cushman's, her face was

[1] Acting Meg Merrilies on one occasion to Irving's Henry Bertram, she took occasion to give the then young tragedian a useful hint. He had acceded to Meg's plea for alms in the stereotyped stage fashion by giving her his purse. This piece of conventionality grated on her feelings, and she asked him after the performance whether it would not be much more natural for Bertram to take out a handful of coins and pick out some of the smallest of them to give to her. It was a minute point, but a suggestive one, and often recurred to the actor's mind, serving to deter him from other acts of unthinking compliance with unmeaning traditions.

full of charm and womanly sweetness. Womanliness, all her critics are agreed, was the distinguishing feature of her personality as an actress; and it was in love scenes she most excelled. "Her expression of love is the most beautifully confiding and wistfully self-abandoning in its tones," says George Vandenhoff, "that I have witnessed in any actress." Mr. Rudolph Lehmann's interesting portrait, which I have been privileged to borrow from his "Men and Women of the Century," agrees rather curiously with an impressionist sketch of her presented by Théophile Gautier to his readers on the occasion of her visit to Paris with Macready in December, 1844. It is to be found in the third volume of his "Histoire de l'Art Dramatique en France depuis Vingt-Cinq Ans," the collection of his reprinted criticisms. I translate it somewhat freely:

"Miss Helen Faucit, who performed the *rôle* of Desdemona, is a young actress, not pretty exactly, but with expressive and pleasing features, and in her bearing that somewhat affected English grace of the 'Keepsakes' and 'Books of Beauty.' You are familiar with it, of course—the pensive smile, the liquid eyes, the dishevelled hair, the curving shoulders, the satin-like texture of the skin, a certain display and, as it were, confusion in her mode of dress—a hap-hazard effect, often pretty enough, of gauze and ribbons and feathers! By her attire, her carriage, the studied elegance of her attitudes, the poise of her head, the movement of her hands, Miss Helen Faucit constantly recalls the drawings of Chalon and Stephanoff and Charles Heath. Not that there is anything to complain of in all this. For our own part, we cherish no hostility against the actress with a manner; for, nowadays, in their efforts after simplicity, women are too often lacking in grace and ease."

Few actresses have won such enthusiastic eulogies as fell to Miss Faucit's lot throughout her stage career. Her admirers—De Quincey and William Carleton, the Irish story writer, among them—vie with each other in the expression of their homage. A writer in "The Dublin University Magazine" gives us a good account of her as she was in 1846, when she had reached the height of her reputation. She possessed, he declares, all the physical requisites for her art—a person graceful and dignified, a voice supremely fascinating in "its most silver

flow," yet capable of giving utterance to the most commanding passion, a face wonderful in the magic and variety of its expression. "Juliet, Rosalind, the Lady Constance, Portia, Lady Macbeth, 'divine Imogen,' Beatrice, all crowd upon our fancy; and after them Pauline, a character made more by Miss Faucit than by the author. . . . To have seen Miss Faucit in these characters is to have seen a whole world of poetry revealed, of which the most enthusiastic and intelligent study of the authors could have helped us to no idea. Where the author has furnished a barren outline she pours into it the strength and radiance of her own spirit, and a noble picture glows before us. Nor is this true only in the case of inferior parts. In dealing with Shakespeare this great actress rises to the full measure of her strength. Her performances are revelations of the great master poet's subtlest powers. When we have once seen them there is a light evermore upon his page which but for the magic of the great commentator would never have been there for us."

Macready's male contemporaries, as I have said, were not actors of much note. Of the four who call for mention John Vandenhoff was the oldest. Born in 1790, of Catholic parents, he was sent to Stonyhurst, the great Jesuit college in Lancashire, where he was a schoolfellow of Richard Lalor Sheil and Sir Thomas Wyse, afterwards British Minister at Athens.[1] He was not a great actor—"a useful mill-horse actor, or rather post-horse," Macready calls him somewhere in his Diary—but he kept alive the Kemble traditions of stately presence and sonorous declamation; and in the provinces, especially in the North, he was a favourite. When at Stonyhurst he had thoughts of becoming a priest, but, like Kemble, he changed his mind. He took to the law at first and afterwards to teaching, and drifted eventually on to the stage. He died in 1864. His son, George Vandenhoff, also an actor, is remem-

[1] It is, perhaps, worth noting that at the end of the century, as at the beginning, three of the most widely-known Stonyhurstians have achieved distinction, respectively, in diplomacy, the drama, and the stage—Sir Nicholas O'Conor, Dr. Conan Doyle, and Mr. "Bernard Gould."

bered chiefly by his "Dramatic Reminiscences," a lively, if not very edifying, production, containing many amusing stories and witty criticisms. His comments on Macready more than avenge that somewhat unflattering characterization of his father which I have just quoted. He is never tired of poking fun at "The Eminent," as he calls the great tragedian, or of showing up his weaknesses. Macready's propensity to taking the centre of the stage—a propensity common, indeed, to almost all actor-managers, and more marked in Phelps, according to Helen Faucit, than in Macready—he ridicules very happily. When Macready played Othello, he declares, "Iago was a mere stoker, whose business it was to supply Othello's passion with fuel, and keep up its high pressure. The next night, perhaps, he took Iago and lo, presto! everything was changed. Othello was to become a mere puppet for Iago to play with."

Tyrone Power, one of Macready's chief supports in comedy during his management of Drury Lane, was the Jack Johnstone of the 'Thirties. Of good family, handsome, well-made, an incarnation of all the lighter and brighter characteristics of his race, he was one of the most striking figures upon the stage of his time, and the salaries he earned at the Haymarket and the Adelphi established a "record" in theatrical finance. In Dublin, as may be imagined, he was always welcomed with boundless enthusiasm. In America, also, he was a great favourite. It was on his return from a fourth visit to New York, in 1840, that he met his death, his steamer, "The President," being lost with all on board. Captain O'Cutter in *The Jealous Wife*, Sir Patrick O'Plenipo in *The Irish Ambassador*, Tim More in *The Irish Lion*—these were the kind of *rôles* in which Power made his name. And so effectually did he make it, that one Thomas Powell, a contemporary actor, born at Swansea ("Taffy was a Welshman—Taffy was a Thief!"), found it worth appropriating, and, with it, much of the owner's fame; for, as Mr. Michael MacDonagh tells us in "The Dictionary of National Biography," the real and the false Power are still apt to be mixed!

The name of Edwin Forrest, renowned throughout the United States as that of the first great American actor of native birth, is chiefly associated in the minds of English theatrical readers with Macready's visit to New York and Boston in 1848, and the unfortunate disturbances which accompanied it. The story of these disturbances, their origin and development, is long and complex, and I have no room for it here; it will be found lucidly and succinctly told in Chapter VI. of Mr. Archer's life of Macready. Suffice it to recall the main facts: that some contemptuous references to Forrest, written by John Forster, Macready's most intimate friend, under circumstances which made it appear not impossible that they were inspired by Macready himself, aroused the American actor's hatred and indignation; that these feelings communicated themselves to his countrymen, and that when Macready arrived in America he met with some extremely hostile receptions, culminating in a serious riot, in which, the military having been called out, several hundred lives were lost.

Forrest visited London twice; on the first occasion he was well received; on the second, when Charlotte Cushman acted with him (and completely outshone him), he proved far less successful. He would seem to have had in him some of the makings of a really great tragedian. "He was endowed physically beyond any actor I have seen," says Mr. Hermann Vezin, upon whose critical mind his performances made "a profound and lasting impression." "He might have stood for a model of Hercules, massive but beautifully proportioned." He had, too, a magnificent voice and a strikingly handsome face. His faults Mr. Vezin attributes, not to any defect of feeling or of intelligence or of histrionic power, but to his lack of culture and to the demoralizing influence of rough and ignorant audiences. Had Forrest been brought up in an old country, he says, he would have been placed on a footing with Garrick and Mrs. Siddons, Talma and Edmund Kean.

His physical strength was a source of histrionic weakness, for he was tempted to display it, in and out of season, by the outbursts of applause he could always thereby evoke. Numberless stories are told of his prowess in this direction. On

one occasion, when appearing as Damon in *Damon and Pythias*, he is said to have carried out the chastisement of Lucullus—a servant who has incurred Damon's righteous indignation—in a terribly realistic manner, and then, having "mopped the stage" with him, to have cast him helpless behind the scenes. "Some one" (proceeds the narrator of the story), "seeing the pale and trembling fellow gasping for breath and bleeding, asked him what was the matter. Lucullus stammered out, with a piteous pride in the honour of the thing, 'I have been playing with Forrest.' 'Indeed,' returned the other, 'by the look of you I should have thought Forrest had been playing with you.'"

John Forster, in one of a series of terribly severe criticisms on Forrest's Shakespearean impersonations, records that he threw another actor behind the scenes in somewhat similar fashion. But perhaps the most remarkable example of his athletic achievements upon record is that which Mr. Stephen Fiske thus recorded in "The Era Almanack" for 1873—one is free, of course, to take it with a grain of salt!

"On one occasion Mr. Edwin Forrest, the American tragedian, then a young man, and more famous for his muscle than his genius, gave a most tremendous display of really powerful acting. He was supposed to represent a Roman warrior, and to be attacked by six minions of a detested tyrant. At the rehearsals Mr. Forrest found a great deal of fault with the supers who condescended to play the minions. They were too tame. They didn't lay hold of him. They didn't go in as if it were a real fight. Mr. Forrest stormed and threatened; the supers sulked and consulted. At length the captain of the supers inquired in his local slang, 'Yer want this to be a bully fight, eh?' 'I do,' replied Mr. Forrest. 'All right,' rejoined the captain, and the rehearsal quietly proceeded. In the evening the little theatre was crowded, and Mr. Forrest was enthusiastically received. When the fighting scene occurred, the great tragedian took the centre of the stage, and the six minions entered rapidly and deployed in skirmishing order. At the cue 'Seize him!' one minion assumed a pugilistic attitude and struck a blow straight from the shoulder upon the prominent nose of the Roman hero; another raised him about six inches from the stage with a well-directed kick, and others made ready to rush in for a decisive tussle. For a moment Mr. Forrest stood astounded, his broad chest heaving with rage, his great eyes flashing with fire, his legs planted

like columns upon the stage. Then came a few minutes of powerful acting, at the end of which one super was found sticking head foremost in a bass-drum in the orchestra, four were having their wounds dressed in the green room, and one, finding himself in the flies, rushed out upon the roof of the theatre and shouted 'Fire!' at the top of his voice; while Mr. Forrest, called before the curtain, bowed his thanks pantingly to the applauding audience, who looked upon the whole affair as part of the piece, and had never seen Forrest act so splendidly."

In one of the severe criticisms already alluded to John Forster accuses Forrest of imitating Edmund Kean and James Wallack. This must have been a peculiarly incensing piece of criticism, for Kean and Wallack were as the poles asunder, and it must have been impossible for poor Forrest, who had first become stage-struck through seeing Kean act in the States, and who afterwards had come somewhat under the influence of the lesser tragedian—an actor of the Kemble school, handsome, stately, "classical"—to avoid recalling at times either the one or the other. Wallack's career was not brilliant, but it was eminently successful. I have not met with any descriptions of his acting that call for inclusion here. The only really enthusiastic reference to him that I remember, by any critic of note, occurs in a description by Fanny Kemble of his performance in *The Rent Day*, by Douglas Jerrold, a play of which M. Filon has given a pleasant account in "The English Stage." She was greatly delighted with him, she says, and thought him "handsome, of a rustic kind, the very thing for the part he played, a fine English yeoman."

CHAPTER VIII

The Stage in the 'Fifties

Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, and Lamb, and those others in whose company we started on our ramble through the century, have now been left far behind. On our next two stages George Henry Lewes, Professor Henry Morley, Mr. Dutton Cook, Mr. Westland Marston, M. Augustin Filon, Mr. Edmund Yates, and Mr. George Augustus Sala will be our guides.

George Henry Lewes—George Eliot's Lewes, otherwise famous by his "Life of Goethe" and his "History of Philosophy" (and as one of the three ugliest men in London Society)—acted as regular theatrical critic during the years 1850-54 for a paper called "The Leader," of which he was a founder. His articles, which have been collected together and republished in the third volume of the series of "Dramatic Essays" edited by Mr. Archer and Mr. Lowe, bear comparison for critical insight and power of expression with the best of Hazlitt's, and for freshness and liveliness and unconventionality with those of Mr. George Bernard Shaw. At first he wrote anonymously, but in the third number of the journal he assumed the name of "Vivian." Here is the paragraph in which he introduced himself under this appellation:

"Angry authors and irritated actors are fond of styling us, the the nobles of the Fourth Estate, 'anonymous scribblers.' I don't like this; I won't have it assumed that my fine Roman hand ever could be anonymous; accordingly, from this time forward, I throw aside the veil which modesty dropped over my countenance, and stand forth confessed as the author of all the brilliant criticisms, shameless eulogies, and remorseless 'attacks' which may issue from my incomparable judgment, devoted partisanship, and deranged liver. I am prepared for all the 'responsibility' of my office. Brother critics may

do as they please, but if I am a 'hired bravo,' I will no longer wear a mask. Managers, authors, actors *tr-r-remble!* Vivian is pitiless!"

Vivian, in fact, was a prototype of the "New Journalists" of to-day. The tendency to indulge in frolicsome personal confessions, to ventilate comic grievances, and to talk at large about anything and everything except the subject nominally under treatment, which we associate with the initials "G. B. S.," is to be found in a hardly less degree in Lewes. He took as his motto Rousseau's "Je sais bien que le lecteur n'a pas grand besoin de savoir tout cela, mais moi j'ai grand besoin de le lui dire." He invented for himself, too, a kind of dual personality—that of a gay young bachelor who, when not dallying with a certain "stately Harriet" or other (imaginary) fair ladies of his acquaintance, found an absorbing occupation in the study of Patristic Theology. "Vivian not at the Play" he entitles an article in which, instead of dealing with *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, the piece of the moment, he explains that he has not been to see it, but has stopped at home and devoted himself to the earliest example of the Modern Drama, reputed to be the product of his "favourite Gregory of Nazianzen." At another time he devotes a whole article to a comic description of his going to the opera in gray trousers and being refused admission. But, perhaps, the best instance of "Vivian vivianising," as Mr. Archer puts it, is to be found in a criticism which he entitled "De Rebus Scenicis (Et Quibusdam Aliis)." A serious and matter-of-fact reader, who would fain keep this irresponsible critic to the point, has objected to some allusions to one "gay Maria" as being irrelevant. Vivian's retort is a masterpiece of frivolity. "He objects to my telling him about Maria's eyes!—'What does he care about Maria?' If it comes to that, what does Maria care about him?"

But Lewes, though so far from being *un sérieux homme*—to borrow a convenient distinction from the French grammar—was essentially *un homme sérieux;* and in his *rôle* of "Æsthetic Policeman," he is often grave enough. In the longer essays, indeed, which he himself republished—"On Actors and the Art of Acting"—he discards completely the cap and bells.

Professor Morley was a staider and less brilliant critic, but he was as keen as Lewes in his enjoyment of the theatre and in his anxiety to serve it. "The better the stage," he held, "the better the town." The great want of the stage, he was never tired of urging, was an educated public that should care for its success, honestly inquire into its failures, and make managers and actors feel that they were not dependent for appreciation on the verdict of the gods in the gallery and the young bloods in the stalls. "The best actor," he contended, "exercising his delightful art upon material that will bring all the subtlest powers into use, is as true an artist as the poet or the painter or the sculptor, and even more worthy than these of immediate repute, since that alone is his reward. The sculptor, painter, poet, misunderstood in his own time, leaves his work to do him right. The actor's labour is for ever lost if it miss instant recognition.

These extracts from the "Prologue" to "The Journal of a London Playgoer" indicate sufficiently the sympathetic spirit in which Professor Morley set to work. He stuck to his post, a Casabianca among critics, when "all but he had fled.'[1] Lewes gave up in 1854, and for long, dramatic criticism was at its lowest; but this sturdy student was not to be discouraged. For fourteen or fifteen years—from 1851 to 1866—he sat "at the bedside of the ailing Drama," and furnished "The Examiner" with "notes from his case-book on its symptoms," his warm interest in the patient never affecting his determination to set down precisely what he took for truth; always "desiring to see our Drama, with a clean tongue and a steady pulse, able to resume its place in society as a chief form of Literature, with a stage fitly interpreting its thought, and in wide honour as one of the strongest of all secular aids towards the intellectual refinement of the people."

Mr. Dutton Cook may be regarded in a sense as Professor Morley's successor, for he was a no less assiduous and conscientious critic (on "The Pall Mall Gazette" and on "The World") from 1867 to 1881. A selection from his theatrical contributions to these papers, covering the whole period of fourteen

[1] One should, perhaps, except John Oxenford of "The Times."

years, was published in 1883 under the title of "Nights at the Play." To the student of the theatre it is an interesting and valuable book; but, as he himself says modestly in his preface to it, "it can scarcely claim to interest those who are not predisposed to be interested in the subject." His "Hours with the Players," a collection of essays, is a more entertaining volume; anyone—"predisposed to be interested" or not—picking it up in a leisure hour, would soon be absorbed in these pleasant chapters from theatrical history. The same might be said, I think, of Mr. Westland Marston's reminiscences of "Our Recent Actors," and of Mr. Barton Baker's "The London Stage," from which I have quoted so often already. Both Mr. Westland Marston and Mr. Baker were eye-witnesses of the scenes (during these two decades) which they depict, and both have the faculty of vivid description. M. Filon, also, dates his first acquaintance with our theatre from the 'Sixties, and his account of the Victorian drama contains no pleasanter pages than those which tell of the Bancrofts and "Tom" Robertson. The writings of the late Edmund Yates and George Augustus Sala require no characterization.

So much for the critics and historians of the 'Fifties and the 'Sixties. Before we come to the players, it may be worth while to glance for a moment at the history of the play-houses.

At the beginning of the century, as we have seen, London had but five theatres. Between 1800 and 1850, some ten others had come into being: the Adelphi, under the title of the *Sans Pareil*, in 1809; the Lyceum (after various pre-existences) in 1809; the Surrey, previously a circus, in the same year; the Olympic in 1813; the Queen's in 1814; the Victoria in 1816; the Strand in 1832; the St. James's in 1835; and the Royalty and the Princess's in 1840.

It was not until 1819 that the Adelphi was thus named. The earliest productions here of note were dramatic versions of Scott's novels—*Waverley*, *Ivanhoe*, *Kenilworth*, *The Heart of Midlothian*, *St. Ronan's Well*. The success of these was eclipsed in 1821 by an adaptation of Pierce Egan's famous

but now forgotten story (illustrated by Cruikshank), *Tom and Jerry*. *A Wreck Ashore*, by Buckstone—a comedian whose fame was to be bound up with the Haymarket in later years—produced in 1830, is regarded as the first of the long series of "Adelphi Melodramas" which have been the principal mainstay of the theatre ever since. In 1838 the Adelphi lost its most popular comic actor through the early death of John Reeve, the histrionic grandfather, as one may call him, of Mr. Toole. His place, however, was filled almost immediately by Edward Wright, whose drollery in Buckstone's *Green Bushes* made Edmund Yates fall "helpless, spineless, across the front of the box, sick with laughter." In 1844 the theatre came under the management of Benjamin Webster (of whom more presently) and Madame Céleste, a vivacious French actress—originally a ballet-dancer—who had delighted the play-going world, in the *Green Bushes*, by her performance of the little Indian girl, Miami. But the Buckstone type of melodrama held the boards until 1849, when, with *The Flowers of the Forest*, it breathed its last; and when a younger generation of dramatists began to come to the front—Charles Reade, Tom Taylor, Watts Philips, and Dion Boucicault among the number. *The Colleen Bawn* was the success of 1860, *Rip Van Winkle* that of 1865, while the appearance of John Lawrence Toole (in place of Wright) was the great event of 1866. In 1872 the management passed to the Gattis, in whose hands it has remained ever since.

The pre-existences of the Lyceum are worth enumerating. In 1765, there had been here an Exhibition Hall of the Society of Artists, some of whom migrated three years later to Somerset House, there to found the Royal Academy. Assembly Rooms succeeded to the Exhibition Hall, and gave place in 1789 to Charles Dibdin's Musical and Variety Entertainments known as *Sans Souci*. From 1791 to 1794 it served as one of Astley's score of amphitheatres, and from circus it passed to pantomime. Then in quick succession it became a concert room, a chapel, the show place of a "White Negro Girl" and of a "Porcupine Man," and finally, in 1802, the first hall of Madame Tussaud. In 1809, when it first became a regular



H. N. King, photo.]

MADAME CÉLESTE AS "CYNTHIA" IN "THE FLOWERS OF THE FOREST."

theatre, it was licensed for dramatic performances each winter for the benefit of the burnt out company of Drury Lane, until the new Drury Lane was re-opened in 1812. In 1810 it was entitled the English Opera House, the original name being dropped, and was given up entirely to musical entertainments. But it is from June, 1816, when the new theatre was opened alongside Exeter Change—a sort of combination of aquarium and menagerie—that its real history may be said to begin. Here it was that in 1818 Mathews gave his "At Home" entertainments, that Mrs. Glover appeared as Hamlet, and that the first stage version of *Guy Mannering* was produced, with Miss Kelly as Meg Merrilies. In 1830 the theatre was burnt down, and in 1834—Exeter Change by this time being a thing of the past—the actual Lyceum was erected. It was devoted at first to French plays and to Italian opera, then to English opera, then to German, then to Italian again. In 1834 it renounced music for good and all, and, ceasing to call itself an Opera House, became the Theatre Royal, Lyceum, under the management of the Keeleys. Later, Madame Vestris and Charles Mathews took it, and under their sway it became the most popular play-house in London, extravaganzas being perhaps its most unfailing attraction. But as Mathews himself records, "all the large receipts accruing from the brilliant houses from Christmas to Easter were more than swallowed up by the utter blank that followed from Easter to Michaelmas," and bankruptcy after seven years was the result. In 1856 Charles Dillon, an able actor, one of whose chief titles to fame is that he discovered Lady Bancroft, undertook the management of the theatre, appearing himself in *Belphegor*, and as D'Artagnan in *The Three Musketeers*. From 1863 to 1867 all London was drawn to it by the brilliancy of Fechter, and in 1869 by the charm of Adelaide Neilson. Then came Irving.

The history of the Princess's up to September, 1850, when Charles Kean began his nine years' management in partnership with Robert Keeley, is notable chiefly for the performances of James Wallack in 1844 and of Edwin Forrest and Charlotte Cushman in 1845. It was here in 1859, after Kean's tenancy was concluded, that Fechter first attracted

attention. In 1863 a hardly less powerful attraction was found in Stella Colas, a French *ingénue*, whose Juliet, though it set the critics' teeth on edge, delighted the general public. The following years saw the production here of several of the most famous melodramas of the century, among others *Arrah-na-Pogue* and *It's Never too Late to Mend.* In 1869 Benjamin Webster, now an old man, undertook the management, and the years 1872, 1873, and 1875 were signalized by the reappearance successively of Phelps, Charles Dillon, and Joseph Jefferson. Mr. Charles Warner's acting as Coupeau in Reade's version of *L'Assommoir—Drink*—was the event of 1879. Then came Mr. Wilson Barrett with Madame Modjeska in 1881, inaugurating a new era.

Of the early days of the Olympic Mr. George Augustus Sala gave an interesting account in a sketch of the career of Frederick Robson, which he wrote in 1864 for American readers while on tour in the States. "About fifteen years ago," he said, "there stood in Wych Street a queer, low-browed little building with a rough wooden portico before it, . . . and with little blinking windows, very much resembling the portholes of a man-of-war. According to tradition, the place had, indeed, a kind of naval origin. Old King George III., who, when he was not mad, or meddling with politics, was really a good-natured kind of man, once made Philip Astley, the riding-master, and proprietor of the circus in South Lambeth, a present of a dismantled seventy-four gun-ship captured from the French. With these timbers, some lath and plaster, a few bricks, and a little money, Astley ran up a theatre dedicated to the performance of interludes and *burlettas*—that is, of pieces in which the dialogue was not spoken, but sung, in order to avoid interference with the patent-rights of Drury Lane and Covent Garden. In our days this edifice was known as the Olympic. When I knew this theatre first it had fallen into a state of seemingly hopeless decadence. Nobody succeeded there. To lease the Olympic Theatre was to court bankruptcy and invite collapse. The charming Vestris had been its tenant for a while. There Liston and Wrench had delighted the town with their most



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

MISS KATE TERRY.



H. N. King, photo.]

MISS ELLEN TERRY.



H. N. King, photo.]

MISS ELLEN TERRY.



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

MISS KATE TERRY.

SOME EARLY PORTRAITS OF MISS KATE AND MISS ELLEN TERRY.



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

MISS KATE TERRY AS "JULIET."



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

MISS KATE TERRY REFLECTED BY MISS ELLEN TERRY.

excellent fooling. There many of Planché's most sparkling burlesques had been produced. There a perfect boudoir of a green room had been fitted up by Bartolozzi's beautiful and witty daughter; and there Hook and Jerrold, Haynes Bayley and à Beckett had uttered their wittiest sayings. But the destiny of the Olympic was indomitable. There was nae luck about the house; and Eliza Vestris went bankrupt at last. Management after management tried its fortunes in the doomed little house, but without success. Desperate adventurers seized upon it as a last resource, or chose it as a place wherein to consummate their ruin. The Olympic was contiguous to the Insolvent Debtors' Court in Portugal Street, and from the paint-pots of the Olympic scene-room to the whitewash of the commercial tribunal there was but one step." It was under Wigan's management, beginning in 1853, that, with the appearance of "Little Robson," its fortunes revived. In 1864, after Robson's early death, it achieved new popularity through *The Ticket-of-Leave Man*, in which Mr. Henry Neville, as Bob Brierly, made his first great success; and through the gifts and graces of Miss Kate Terry. Afterwards Emery as Peggotty in an adaptation of "David Copperfield"—*Little Em'ly* it was called—made a hit. Then came the management of Miss Ada Cavendish, notable chiefly for her emotional rendering of Wilkie Collins's *New Magdalen;* and the management, from 1873 to 1879, of Mr. Neville.

Of the Queen's; of the St. James's, which Mitchell, the Bond Street bookseller, kept at the service of foreign actors (among them the great Rachel, in 1842); of the Strand; and of the Royalty, there is nothing previously to 1850 that calls for mention; their subsequent history may be touched on incidentally in the following pages. Nor do the records of the Surrey and the Victoria contain anything of note. To the story of the older houses I need hardly return. Covent Garden and Drury Lane lost their lustre with the final disappearance of the Macready generation of actors, and were devoted, in 1847 and 1853 respectively—the former entirely, the latter intermittently—to opera and other forms of musical entertainment. The Haymarket, under Webster from 1837 to

1853, and under Buckstone from 1853 to 1876, retained its old ascendancy.

There are some among the players still popular in the 'Fifties and the 'Sixties who might have been dealt with as contemporaries of Macready or of Kean, or even of the Kembles. Conspicuous among these is Madame Vestris.

Madame Lucia Elizabeth Vestris, the most bewitching actress on the London stage since the death of Mrs. Jordan, was born in 1797. She was the granddaughter of Francesco Bartolozzi, the engraver. In 1813, when only sixteen years old, she married M. Armand Vestris, a ballet dancer, grandson of that more famous Vestris who achieved the appellation "Le Dieu de la Danse." Deserted by her husband after two or three years, Madame Vestris made an attempt to earn her own living upon the Paris stage, but without much success. At Drury Lane she was received with more favour, and as Giovanni in *Giovanni in London* she won all hearts. Her next success was in *Paul Pry* at the Haymarket, in which she sang "Cherry Ripe" in such a fashion that its words and tune soon permeated the whole country, much as "Nancy Lee" did in our own time. In 1830 she undertook the management of the Olympic, and in 1838 she married Charles Mathews the younger, with whom she toured and honeymooned in America. In 1847 they took the Lyceum together. In 1854 she retired. Many descriptions have been written of Madame Vestris, but the following by Westland Marston is, I think, the best:

"She was charmingly arch and vivacious, with a happy carelessness which helped effect, with an occasional air of playful *mutinerie* that increased public favour by her evident consciousness of it. Let it be added that she never failed to give her personal attraction the advantage of rich and tasteful costume, and that she was such a votary of elegance in dress that she would display it even in rustic or humble characters. That a silk skirt, a lace-edged petticoat, a silk stocking, a shoe of satin or patent leather, would never have been worn by some of the characters she personated, was of no more concern to her on the ground of consistency than were their rich attire to Marie Antoinette and the ladies of her Court when they masqueraded as shepherdesses



H. N. King, photo.]

CHARLES MATHEWS AS "THE MAID OF ALL WORK."

and milkmaids in the grounds of Petit Trianon. Like Miss Neilson in later days, she cultivated a personal understanding with her audience. . . . It was, I fancy, her practice of taking the house into her confidence, combined with her coquetry and personal attractions, that rendered Vestris so bewitching to the public. When she sang she looked with a questioning archness at her audience, as if to say, 'Do you enjoy that as I do? Did I give it with tolerable effect?' And though in the delivery of dialogue she could hardly be called keen or brilliant, she knew what mischief and retort meant. When she had given a sting to the latter, she would glance round as to ask for approval, with a smile that seemed to say, 'I was a little severe there. He felt that, I suppose!'"

But this shows us only one side of her talent. In the following criticism of her performance with Charles Mathews at the Lyceum in *The Day of Reckoning*, an adaptation from the French, Lewes puts her before us in another aspect:

"Vestris and Charles Mathews were natural—nothing more; nothing less. They were a lady and gentleman such as we meet in drawing rooms, graceful, quiet, well-bred, perfectly dressed, perfectly oblivious of the footlights. He is a polished villain—a D'Orsay without conscience, and without any of the scowlings, stampings, or intonations of the approved stage villain. There are scoundrels in high life, but they are perfectly well bred. Whatever faults there may be in their conduct, their deportment is irreproachable. This is the villain represented by Charles Mathews—a man of fashion, reckless, extravagant, heartless, but perfectly unconscious of his being worse than his neighbours. Those who are familiar with his 'used up' expression will understand how he represents the quiet elegance of the part, but they must see him in this to appreciate his refined villainy and self-possession and gentlemanly devilishness. In every detail of his dress in every gesture, and in every look, I recognize an artist representing nature. It is, of course, a higher thing to play Othello or Macbeth, and I do not wish to exaggerate the importance of this part; but I say that in this part he was perfection. A Teniers may not be a Raphael, but it is worth a hundred ambitious attempts to be a Raphael.

"This reliance on nature is what touches me so in Vestris. Her character is one which in most hands would become morbid or melodramatic; a sad, neglected wife, loving another man, of whom her husband is jealous, and solacing her unhappiness by constant beneficence to the poor. A noble, loving, suffering woman, she stands there, represented with a truth, a grace, a gentle pathos I have no

epithets to characterize. The sad dignity with which she bears her husband's insults, the terror which agitates her when that husband intimates his knowledge that her lover is in an adjoining room, and that he, her husband, is permitted by the law to kill him—these things are represented in a manner very unlike that current on the stage, and recall the finished art of French comedy."

Madame Vestris was in her forty-third year when she married Charles Mathews, and as she had always had a hospitable heart, their union was a theme for many jests: on some one's saying that before the wedding she had made to her future husband a full confession of all her peccadilloes—"What courage!" some one also commented; "And *what* a memory!" exclaimed a third. On her death, in 1857, Charles Mathews married again. His brilliant career lasted until 1878. In 1875 he was, according to the number of "Vanity Fair" in which "Ape's" caricature of him appeared, "Our Only Comedian."

Robert Keeley was another contemporary of Macready's who seems only now to have reached the full ripeness of his powers; at any rate, his quaint little barrel of a figure stands out more conspicuously in the 'Fifties than ever before, though he had been a popular comedian already for some thirty years. He was born in 1793, and made his *début* at the Olympic under Elliston's management in 1818. Engagements followed at Drury Lane and at Covent Garden, where he met and married Miss Goward, a clever little actress thirteen years his junior, now a hale and hearty old lady of ninety-two. In 1838 Mr. and Mrs. Keeley joined Madame Vestris's company at the Olympic, where they remained until the season of 1841-2, for which they were engaged by Macready at Drury Lane. From 1844 to 1847 they were at the Lyceum, and from 1850 to 1852 at the Princess's—then at the Haymarket, the Adelphi, the Olympic, and Drury Lane. Keeley retired in 1857 and died in 1869. Here is Lewes's pleasant description of husband and wife from "On Actors and the Art of Acting":

"Keeley was undoubtedly equipped with unusual advantages, over and above his intelligence. His handsome, pleasant features, set in a large fat face, his beetling brow and twinkling eye, his rotund little



MR. JOHN HARE.



MR. ARTHUR CECIL.



MR. CHARLES MATHEWS.



MR. HAWTREY.

A QUARTETTE OF COMEDIANS.

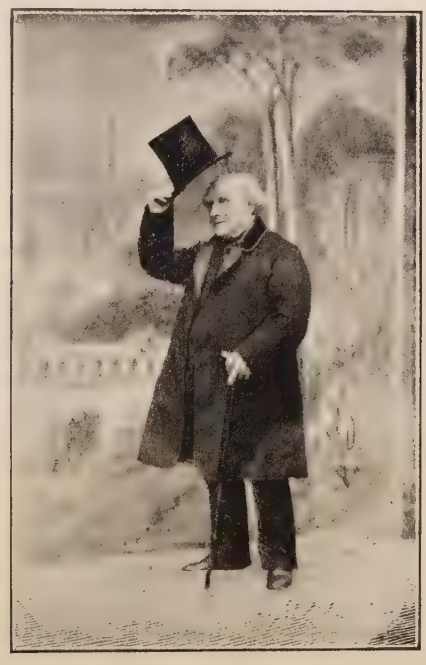
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Adolphe Beau, photo.]

MR. AND MRS. KEELEY.

body, neither graceful nor inactive, at once prepossessed the spectator; and his unctuous voice and laugh completed the conquest. He was drollery personified; drollery without caricature, drollery that had an *arrière pensée* of cleverness and nothing of harshness or extravagance. To define him by comparison, he was a duodecimo Falstaff.

"Mrs. Keeley had little or none of the unctuousness of her husband, but she also was remarkably endowed. She was as intense and pointed as he was easy and fluent. She concentrated into her repartees an amount of intellectual *vis* and devil which gave such a feather to a shaft that authors must often have been surprised at the revelation to themselves of the force of their own wit. Eye, voice, gesture sparkled and chuckled. You could see that she enjoyed the joke, but enjoyed it rather as an intellectual triumph over others than (as in Keeley's case) from an impersonal delight in the joke itself. Keeley was like a fat, happy, self-satisfied puppy, taking life easily, ready to get sniffing and enjoyment out of everything. Mrs. Keeley was like a sprightly kitten, eager to make a mouse of every moving thing."

Webster and Buckstone had a good deal in common in their careers. They were nearly of the same age—Webster born in 1800, Buckstone in 1802; both had wished to join the navy; both made their first appearance in London about the same time, in 1825 and 1824 respectively; both were connected principally with the Adelphi and the Haymarket; and both lived to a good old age—Webster until 1882, Buckstone until 1879; both having acted until they had passed their seventieth year. Both, I may add, were playwrights as well as players.

Buckstone's is the more striking personality. The better to describe Buckstone, everyone contrasted him with Keeley, who was his opposite. Keeley, says Westland Marston, was phlegmatic, impassive, and pathetically acquiescent in the droll inflictions which fate had in store for him. Buckstone he had seen first "at the Adelphi blowing a trombone with inflated cheeks, evidently to his own delight and much to the annoyance of his companions on the stage," and ever afterwards he connected him in his mind with this performance.

"Buckstone," he goes on, "in all his characters was metaphorically the trombone-player, calling attention to his humour by salient and very effective appeals to his audience, demonstrative, various, gesticulatory. . . . To carry drollery to its furthest point seemed the height

of his ambition. . . . The brainless, conceited, cowardly Sir Andrew Aguecheek, with his efforts at wit and his repugnance to cold steel, is, even when acted with moderation, a very laughable person; but with Buckstone's smirking self-complacency, with his variety of grimace and contortion, a height of absurdity was reached which delighted the public if not always the critic. To see him, again, as Sir Benjamin Backbite in *The School for Scandal* was a rare treat for those who were not nice as to the boundary line between comedy and farce. How absurd was his affectation of modesty; with what zest did he convey his insinuations against character, and then play aside the part of hilarious chorus to the effect he had produced! It is true that in almost every part he was Buckstone; it is equally so that the public did not wish him to be anyone else. There were good reasons for this. Never was there a face more fitted to excite mirth—there being an expression of astuteness and self-restraint in the upper part of his face, while the lips and the lines from the nose downwards seemed on the alert for a grin, giving a union of shrewdness and drollery that was irresistibly comic. Add to these a voice that now doled out in tones (at times nasal) of humorous languor, as if enjoying by anticipation the fun it was about to produce, and then surprised you by a loud and triumphant burst as the point was made. He knew he was the pet of the audience, and never lost his chance of taking it into his confidence by a sort of advertising look, which seemed to say, 'Attention! something droll is about to happen.'"

Webster is best remembered as the creator of the *rôle* of Triplet in *Masks and Faces*, that "very manly and right-minded little comedy" (as Professor Morley calls it in his criticism of the first performance) produced at the Haymarket under his own management in November, 1852. Professor Morley and George Henry Lewes are equally enthusiastic over this impersonation. "There is a poor poet," says the former, "who doubles the scanty callings of painter and player, and whom Goldsmith could not have better described or Leslie painted than Mr. Webster acts him." Lewes's description I shall quote in full—it includes also an account of Leigh Murray, another popular actor of those days, in a characteristic *rôle*:

"Webster surpassed himself in Triplet—the poor poet, painter, and actor. There was an abashed seediness of manner only half covering the glimmering vanity and hope which shone beneath, as the fire shines through the ashes—a radiant confidence in his own genius, which

neglect and failure might sadden but could not suppress—a contrast between the visionary splendour of hopes formed in the twilight of reverie, which magnifies all things, and the actual poverty which was breaking his heart for the dear ones at the fireless hearth in a word, there was a picture of the poor poet such as the stage has never seen before—the eye lighting up its signal of contradiction to the seedy dress and starved sallowness of complexion. In his first scene, where the tragedies are rejected, and where Peg Woffington melts him with her kindness, he was less obviously (but as truly) a fine actor than in the garret scene, which is more effective on the stage. But go and see him, I say again, and note, at the same time, the delicate *nuances* with which Leigh Murray varies his coxcombs. In *Money* he plays a quiet, selfish coxcomb; in *The Foundlings* he is inimitable as a good-natured coxcomb, just stepped from the Guards Club; in *Masks and Faces* he plays a selfish, but clever, cold, unscrupulous coxcomb, who is a fine gentleman because he is thrown among fine gentlemen, but whose quiet self-mastery and steady intellect imply that he is capable of playing a part in the world. For gentlemanly ease of bearing and truth of elocution, quiet as effective, I commend this to your notice. If he will step aside with me for a moment I will just whisper that he makes rather too frequent use of the snuff-box; but that is the only fault and a slight one."

Lewes is enthusiastic also about Mrs. Stirling's Peg Woffington:

"Mrs. Stirling has not for a long while had a part which shows her off to such advantage, and she evidently resolved not to let a bit of it slip through her fingers. She was gay, natural, touching, loving throughout, and one perfectly understands Ernest Vane's infatuation, though not his subsequent desertion of her for his wife. There must be some extraordinary charm in 'conjugal love,' some intense fascination in legal happiness, which has hitherto escaped my observation; or else no man could possibly, with forty parsons' power of morality, think of quitting such a Peg Woffington for such a Mrs. Vane! I must marry and find out that secret! If I do marry, beloved reader (I shan't, but I put the extreme hypothesis), I will tell you all about it; isn't that my function in this majestic universe—to tell you 'all about' everything!"

Webster, like most comedians, had hankerings at times after tragedy, but he was dolefully conscious of his limitations. On one occasion Westland Marston read aloud to him a scene or

two from a poetic drama of his, in blank verse, with a view to its production at his theatre. "But who," asked Webster, "is to play the chief character?" "Mr. Benjamin Webster," replied Marston, who liked giving pleasure (and who seems moreover to have been never wanting in diplomacy)—"Mr. Benjamin Webster, if he will." Webster was intensely gratified. "What!" he cried, with a warm grasp of the young playwright's hand, "do you really think I could sustain the chief part, almost tragic, in a poetic drama?" Marston expressed the wish that he should make the experiment. "I should like it," he answered, "I should like it, but——" "Perhaps," comments Marston, in telling the story, "there was reason in that 'but.'"

Charles Kean was a long time coming to the position of prominence which he enjoyed throughout the period of his management of the Princess's. "Charley, my boy, you shall go to Eton!" the great Kean had exclaimed triumphantly on his return to his humble lodgings off the Strand after his triumph at Drury Lane; and to Eton, ten years later, Charles went. He remained there three years and was then withdrawn, his father wishing him to enter the service of the East India Company, in which he had secured him the offer of a cadetship. But the young Etonian would agree to this only on the condition that his father should settle £400 a year upon his mother, from whom he was separated, and the condition not being complied with, he accepted instead a three years' engagement offered him on the strength of his name (and greatly to his father's annoyance) by Stephen Price, an American, then manager of Drury Lane, the terms being £10 a week rising to £12. At the close of the first season, which was financially a success, though the critics were severe, he visited Glasgow, where, on October 1st, 1828—the anniversary of his *début*—he and his father, with whom he had become reconciled, played together. In 1833 he was engaged at Covent Garden, where on March 25th he played Iago to his father's Othello—the occasion of the elder Kean's complete collapse. Shortly afterwards he quitted the London stage,



H. N. King, photo.]

CHARLES KEAN.

vowing that he would not return until he could command a salary of £50 a night. This he achieved—Harriet Mellon, the Duchess of St. Albans, having used her good offices to attract attention to his provincial tours during the intervening years—in 1838, when he reappeared at Drury Lane for forty-three nights, as Hamlet, Richard III., and Sir Giles Overreach, with immense financial success, but still without conquering the good opinion of the critics. In 1842 he married in Dublin Miss Ellen Tree.

Miss Tree was already an actress of experience. She had made her first appearance at Covent Garden as Olivia in *Twelfth Night*, performed for the benefit of her elder sister, an actress, according to Leigh Hunt, "of a gentle unobtrusive kind," who in Shakespearean *rôles* "looked interesting, spoke the verse in an unaffected tone, and did not spoil any idea which the spectator had cherished"; and a singer also who ranked next in popularity to Miss Kitty Stephens. After engagements in Edinburgh and Bath Miss Ellen Tree found her way to Drury Lane, and thence once more to Covent Garden, where, in Miss Fanny Kemble's drama, *Francis I.*, she performed for the first time in tragedy. "She has not the vocal power of Miss M. Tree," says Talfourd of her, writing in 1826, "but she is much handsomer and is better adapted, both by figure and manner, to represent the heroine of comedy. . . . Her Jane Shore, graceful, unpresuming and feeble, gave no reason to believe that tragedy will ever be her forte, but afforded assurance that she will ever beautifully express the milder sorrows of the sentimental drama."

In 1849, after several seasons at the Haymarket and a second visit to America, began a series of theatricals at Windsor Castle, with the organization of which Charles Kean was intrusted.[1] Then, in August, 1850, came about his partnership with Keeley at the Princess's, and in November of the follow-

[1] The only occasion upon which Macready and Charles Kean acted together was that of a performance of *Julius Cæsar* at Windsor Castle in 1850. Kean, being responsible for all the arrangements, was rewarded for his services by the present of a diamond ring, which he lost; whereupon a wit gave out the report that it "had been found sticking in Macready's gizzard!"

ing year, Keeley having retired from the management, he inaugurated those spectacular revivals of Shakespeare, followed by or alternating with romantic melodramas, to which he owes the best part of his fame.

There was still, however, no pleasing his critics! Poor Charles Kean! how he hated those critics! His success in melodrama—in *Pauline* and in *The Corsican Brothers* and in *Louis XI.*—was admitted, it is true, but always at the expense of his Shakespearean impersonations. Lewes and Douglas Jerrold in particular kept up a running fire of ridicule at his pretensions to the *rôle* of tragedian. Lewes maintained with playful malice that Kean had but used the Shakespearean drama as an exercise ground. "All the time he was detonating through Shakespeare," he exclaims, "he was silently training himself for Dumas. We critics were all on the wrong scent. It was not Othello, it was not Macbeth he was trying to play, it was *The Corsican Brothers*, it was *Pauline*. . . . He has found his vein; the public appreciates it, success is won. Let him peril it no more by Shakespeare. . . . Let him frankly take position as the hero of the Blood and Bogie school, and leave Poetry in unmangled repose."

This was not pleasant reading for any actor, and of all actors who ever lived Charles Kean probably was the most eager for approbation. And he liked his praise "neat." "Discriminating" criticisms, "impartial" appreciations, he detested. "Oh, I hate impartiality," he replied once to Westland Marston, who had been reasoning with him on the subject, "I like the admiration that carries a man away and won't let him stop to think of a few slight and accidental defects." Another time, forcing into Marston's hand a long and elaborate panegyric of one of his own performances, containing no hint even of a single blemish, "Do read it carefully," he said, with earnestness, "that's what I call *criticism*."

There are many other amusing stories of the kind, illustrative of the actor's childlike vanity, in Mr. Westland Marston's book—one in particular, of his ineffectual endeavour to extract a detailed encomium on his own performance in a new play from a friend who had just been bestowing one upon his wife's.

At last, in despair of getting it direct, he passed on his friend to Mrs. Kean, that he might secure it at second-hand. "Pleaded the d—d rubbish that he couldn't praise a man to his face!" he complained of his friend afterwards to Marston.

A gorgeous production of Byron's *Sardanapalus*, in which Layard's recent discoveries were turned to account, was one of Kean's early managerial triumphs at the Princess's. Among his Shakespearean revivals were *King Henry VIII.*, *The Winter's Tale*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (in which, however, he did not act), *Richard II.*, *The Tempest*, *King Lear*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Henry V.* An impression of the effectiveness with which these were produced is to be got from a description given by Mr. Baker of a scene from *Richard II.*, an episode between the fourth and fifth acts. I quote the passage in full:

'The writer of these pages has a vivid recollection of this scene—a winding street, filled with a restless crowd, every personage of which was an independent unit, acting apparently on the impulse of the moment, laughing, jostling, fighting, neck-craning, indulging in horse-play—but never for an instant inert; the doors, windows, and balconies of the antique houses built on each side of the stage were crowded with spectators, some watching the vagaries of the crowd, others straining to catch the first sight of the coming pageant. At the distant sound of the trumpets the street became a chaos, a shouting, scrambling, fighting mob struggling for each coign of vantage, until the advanced guard, pushing back the people right and left, cleared a path. Then came the realization of Shakespeare's fine description:

> 'The rude misgovern'd hands from window tops
> Threw dust and rubbish on King Richard's head.'

While, as Bolingbroke entered upon 'his hot and fiery steed,'

> 'You would have thought the very windows spake,
> So many greedly looks of young and old
> Through casements darted their desiring eyes.'

Nothing more perfect, more realistic than this has ever been seen on any stage."

But it is to his melodramatic performances during these years that he owes the best part of his fame—to *The Corsican*

Brothers, to Lesurques and Dubosc in *The Courier of Lyons*, and to *Louis XI.*, plays which were to afford Irving, also, three of his greatest triumphs. Louis XI. was undoubtedly Kean's greatest *rôle*. Of the death scene Mr. Westland Marston gives us an admirably written account:

"The scene, however, in which Nemours threatens Louis with instant death, introduced effects so new to the stage in a tragic actor, that it must have special record. First there was the effort to meet the terrible emergency with submission, conciliation, denial of guilt, and prayers for mercy. Then, as resource after resource failed the threatened man, there rose from him, with frightful iteration, a cry like that of some hunted creature in its extremity—not a natural pleading cry, however abject, but the scream that speaks of a horrible, purely animal recoil from death. The effect was appalling. In a poetic or heroic character, however criminal, such horror would have been out of place; but in the base nature of Louis, only idealized later by the actual presence of death, it was in keeping with the Dutch literalness, or rather, the grim Hogarthean significance of the entire study."

In private life Charles Kean seems always to have been attractive and even lovable, despite his absurd vanity and somewhat irritable temper. "His friends," says Westland Marston, "will cherish the recollection of a high-principled gentleman, warm in his attachments, generous in extending to others the appreciation he coveted for himself, and gifted with a charm of simple candour that made even his weaknesses endearing."

Phelps was already one of the three or four leading actors of his time when, in 1847, he undertook the management of Sadler's Wells. In the summer of 1842, on the occasion of his acting at the Haymarket with the Keans in Sheridan Knowles's play, *The Rose of Aragon*, his success was so remarkable that Douglas Jerrold was moved to notice it in "Punch" as follows:

"An Unusual Piece of Liberality.

"Mr. Phelps, on the stage of the Haymarket Theatre, publicly presented Mr. Charles Kean last evening with a very handsome silver extinguisher."



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

BUCKSTONE.



Photographer unknown.]

T. P. COOKE.



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

CHARLES MATHEWS.



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

BEDFORD AND TOOLE.

SOME COMEDIANS OF THE 'FIFTIES AND 'SIXTIES.

Even in 1837, when he first came to London, his powers aroused Macready's anxiety, but under the tragedian's management he had not much opportunity of displaying them. Macready saw to that. Macready was the father of a family, and the father of a family, as Talleyrand remarked, is *capable de tout*. This, rather than mere vulgar jealousy, is the explanation, I think, of Macready's attitude towards his younger colleague. He was perfectly candid and straightforward in the matter. "Your time must come," he told him, "but I am not going to try to hasten it. I was kept back by Young and Kean, and you will have to wait for me." Phelps was angry at this treatment, but he confessed in after years "that he should probably have done as Macready had if their places had been changed."

In considering and comparing in one's mind the characters of the leading tragedians of the century, one seems to note a certain gradual growth in them of human nature. Kemble was a statuesque *poseur*, conscientiously "living up to" his own Roman nose. Kean also was not so much a man as a petulent child of genius, though he had more in common with ordinary mortals. Macready's natural self continually broke through the bonds his self-consciousness imposed upon it—in his home, indeed, and with his friends it was almost unfettered: yet one cannot imagine him out of his frock coat—one thinks of his domestic existence as a sort of long-drawn-out English Sunday afternoon. Phelps's humanity was more thorough-going and complete. He had an actor's mobile countenance, and clear enunciation, but in every other respect he was just a simple, natural, wholesome Englishman, beginning his day, one feels sure, with his cold tub, and finding as much time as possible for active exercise—walking, gardening, riding, shooting, and fishing. Fishing was his favourite recreation, and the Red Lion Inn, Farningham, his favourite resort. "Why, dang me!" an astonished Kentish yeoman was betrayed once into exclaiming in a London theatre, in which Phelps was appearing in the title-*rôle* of *The Doge of Venice*,—"Why, dang me, if the Dodge isn't our old fisherman!"

There is a great deal of pleasant reading in the exhaustive biography of Samuel Phelps which we owe to his nephew, Mr. W. May Phelps, and his friend and admirer, Mr. John Forbes-Robertson, father of the distinguished actor of to-day; but one is forced to smile at the whole-heartedness of their idolatry. The actual narrative, one gathers, is the work of Mr. Forbes-Robertson, but Mr. May Phelps's exuberant feelings will not permit him to sit silent for long together, and he breaks in continually upon his colleague's discourse with expressions of his enthusiasm. Never had uncle so appreciative a nephew! Others may not have thought much of Phelps's Romeo: *they were wrong!* "Than the impassioned parts" in it, "W. M. P." tells us in a footnote, "nothing could have been finer." Others may have enjoyed his Falstaff without committing themselves to the statement that it was unrivalled: his nephew is less timorous. "I have seen every Falstaff of my time," he declares, "but not one of them in my opinion approached him either in the breadth of outline or filling up of this wonderful creation." As for his Hamlet, Mr. May Phelps can hardly find words for his admiration. "I unhesitatingly say," he exclaims, "although he was then within two months of attaining his sixty-ninth birthday, it was one of the very finest impersonations of that great character that I ever saw at his hands, and to my thinking his Hamlet was the finest the stage had in my time; this was also the opinion of all the critics whose opinions I thought worth having."

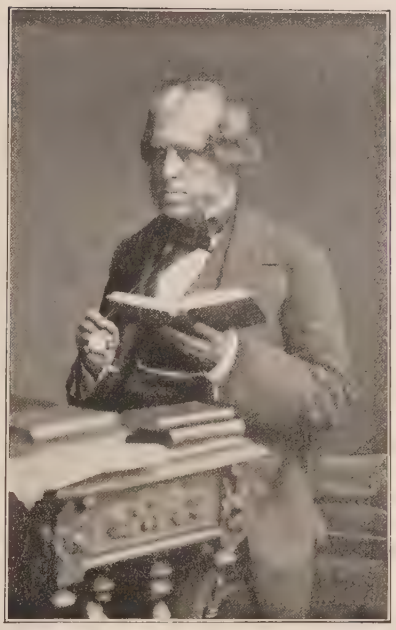
Nor does he confine himself to the utterances of his own individual views: he has an army of "old playgoers" and "competent judges" at his back. Phelps's Mercutio, they assure him, is "equal to Charles Kemble's"; his Sir Giles "a more powerful and terrific piece" of acting than Edmund Kean's.

And Mr. Forbes-Robertson does not dissent from these laudations. When they speak together, indeed, the two biographers gain rather than lose in their fervour. Macbeth, King Lear, Hamlet and Othello, they are of opinion, are the *rôles* in which Phelps most excelled, rivalling, if not outshining, Macready. "It is idle," they proceed, in their introduction to



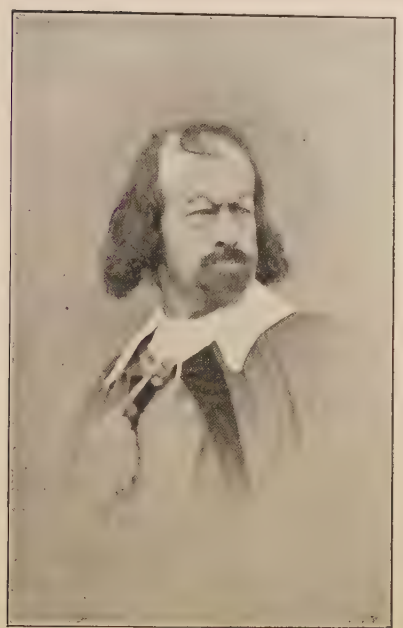
Herbert Watkins, photo.]

BUCKSTONE AS "SIR ANDREW AGUECHEEK."



Window and Grove, photo.]

BANCROFT AS "DR. SPEEDWELL" IN "MAN AND WIFE."



J. E. Mayall, photo.]

PHELPS AS "SHYLOCK."



J. R. James, photo.]

PHELPS AS "RICHELIEU."

From *carte de visite* photographs kindly lent by Sir Squire Bancroft.

the biography, "to institute comparisons, yet, from careful perusal and weighing of what has come down to us, we are forced to the conclusion that neither Burbage nor Betterton, Garrick nor Henderson, could, even by a stretch of imagination, have surpassed Macready or Phelps in the perfect embodiment of those marvellous creations of the great master." They go further still. In the whole history of the theatre they place Phelps "second to none"; he combined, they say, "the dignity, breadth, and intensity" of Kemble with the "fire and impassioned energy" of Kean.

If Phelps was not quite all this, in reality, it may be fairly claimed for him at least that, by his high degree of merit in more than thirty Shakespearean *rôles*, and by his supreme excellence in *one*—Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* —he occupies a distinguished place, a place apart and unique, in the ranks of great actors.

It is probably as the impersonator of Bottom, above all, that he will go down to posterity; Professor Morley has depicted him in the *rôle* in words that are sure to be reproduced by the historian of the English stage. Before Phelps's time, he reminds his readers, actors had made Bottom a mere buffoon; Phelps elaborated and drew subtle meanings out of every line —but the description is too good to be spoilt by *précis* or paraphrase. Here it is, almost in full:

"In the first scene, before we know what his conception is, or in what spirit he means the whole play to be received, we are puzzled by it. We miss the humour, and we get a strange, elaborate, and uncouth dream-figure, a clown restless with vanity (marked by a score of little movements) and speaking ponderously with the uncouth gesticulation of an unreal thing, a grotesque nightmare character. But that, we find, is precisely what the actor had intended to present; and we soon perceived that he was right. Throughout the fairy scenes there is a mist thrown over Bottom by the actor's art. The violent gesticulation becomes stillness, and the hands are fixed on the breast. (They are busy with the unperceived business of managing the movements of the ass's head, but it is not for that reason they are so perfectly still. The change of manner is a part of the conception.) The dream-figure is dreaming, there is dream within dream, Bottom is quiet, his humour becomes more unctuous, but Bottom is translated. He accepts all that happens

quietly, as dreamers do; and the ass's head we also accept quietly, for we too are in the middle of our dream, and it does not create surprise. . . . Quite masterly was the delivery of the speech of Bottom on awakening. He was still a man subdued, but subdued by the sudden plunge into a state of unfathomable wonder. His dream clings about him, he cannot sever the real from the unreal, and still we are made to feel that the reality itself is but a fiction. The preoccupation continues to be manifest during his next scene with the players, and his parting "No more words; away; go away," was in the tone of a man who had lived with spirits and was not yet perfectly returned into the flesh. Nor did the refinement of this conception, if we except the first scene, abate a jot of the laughter that the character of Bottom was intended to excite. The mock play at the end was intensely ludicrous in the presentment, yet nowhere farcical. It was the dream. Bottom as Pyramus was more perfectly the dream-figure than ever. The contrast between the shadowy actor and his part, between Bottom and Pyramus, was marked intensely; and the result was as quaint a phantom as could easily be figured by real flesh."

The whole production of the play was in keeping with Phelps's own performance. "It is doubtful," says Professor Morley, "whether ever yet since it was first written, it has been put upon the stage with so nice an interpretation of its meaning." By his pure taste Phelps showed that it might be made into a most charming entertainment, though in a sense it is the most unactable of plays—"though stage-fairies cannot ride on blue-bells or creep into acorn-cups, though the characters are creatures of the poet's fancy that no flesh and blood can properly present, and though the words they speak are so completely spiritual that they are best felt when they are not spoken." The main feature—the midsummer night—was marked by a scene so elaborated as to impress it upon all as the central picture; and the central idea of the play was never forgotten. It was remembered that mere shadows were to be represented, "that spectators, as Puck reminds them in the epilogue, are to think they have slumbered in their seats, and that what appeared before them have been visions."

"Everything has been subdued as far as possible at Sadler's Wells to this ruling idea. The scenery is very beautiful, but wholly free from the meretricious glitter now in favour. . . . There is no ordinary scene



MRS. WARNER.

From an old engraving.

lifting; but, as in dreams, one scene is made to glide insensibly into another. We follow the lovers and the fairies through the wood from glade to glade, now among trees, now with a broad view of the sea and Athens in the distance, carefully but not at all obtrusively set forth. And not only do the scenes melt dream-like one into another, but over all the fairy portion of the play there is a haze thrown by a curtain of green gauze placed between the actors and the audience, and maintained there during the whole of the second, third, and fourth acts. This gauze curtain is so well spread that there are very few parts of the house from which its presence can be detected, but its influence is everywhere felt; it subdues the flesh and blood of the actors into something more nearly resembling dream-figures, and incorporates more completely the actors with the scenes, throwing the same green fairy tinge and the same mist over all."

It is noteworthy that the excellence of the performance appealed not merely to men of culture, but to the entire audience. Pit and gallery were crowded with eager listeners, and, as Professor Morley quaintly expresses it (what an amusing collection one could make of "English Bulls"!), a "subdued hush arose" before the delivery of the most charming passages. "If the crowd at Drury Lane is a gross discredit," he proceeds, "to the public taste, the crowd at Sadler's Wells more than neutralizes any ill opinion that may on that score be formed of playgoers. The Sadler's Wells gallery, indeed, appeared to be not wholly unconscious of the contrast, for when Bottom volunteered to roar high or roar low, a voice from the gallery desired to know whether he could 'roar like Brooke.' Even the gallery at this theatre, however, resents an interruption, and the unexpected sally was not well received."

I may quote one other passage descriptive of the Sadler's Wells audience, from a later criticism:

"The aspect and behaviour of the pit and gallery at Sadler's Wells during the performance of one of Shakespeare's plays cannot fail to impress most strongly every visitor who is unaccustomed to the place. There sit our working classes in a happy crowd, as orderly and reverent as if they were at church, and yet as unrestrained in their enjoyment as if listening to stories told them by their own firesides. Shakespeare spoke home to the heart of the natural man, even in the

same words that supply matter for nice judgment by the intellect. . . . It is hard to say how much men who have had few advantages of education must in their minds and characters be strengthened and refined when they are made accustomed to this kind of entertainment."

It used to be said that Phelps's management of Sadler's Wells, though so markedly a *succès d'estime*, was financially a failure—that Shakespeare, if he did not here spell ruin, was unable at any rate to pay his way. But one is glad to know, on the authority of the actor's biographers, that this was not the case. "It enabled him," they tell us, "to live like a gentleman for nineteen years, to be able in all his sporting and other excursions to stay at good hotels—he had the best rooms at 'The Lion' at Farningham always kept at his disposal—and, above all, to bring up a family of three sons and three daughters and give them all a first-class education."

Phelps was still upon the stage—he did not quit it for good, indeed, until twelve years later—when "The Journal of a London Playgoer" was published as a volume in 1866. Here, from the "Prologue" to it, is a glimpse of him at this late period of his career—Professor Morley has been condemning that kind of criticism which is keen only in its noting of defects :

"Mr. Phelps, for example, plays his parts with various degrees of merit, and impairs the force of almost all by an undue slowness of delivery. This he acquired probably at Sadler's Wells, where he was training a rude audience to the enjoyment of dramatic poetry, and endeavoured to assure life in slow minds to every word by dwelling upon each with a slight excess of the weight in utterance, which, within certain limits, is required of all who would give value to the reading of good poetry. In course of time, the deliberately measured pace of speech has hardened into mannerism; and considering its origin, the blemish is like that of a scar won in honourable war."

It would be interesting, if one had time for it, to make a study of the life at Sadler's Wells Theatre—in the green room and behind the scenes—during Phelps's management; and to compare the various members of his company with the actors and actresses to whom Mr. Pinero introduces us in his delightful comedy, *Trelawny of the "Wells;"* for Mr. Pinero's



Alfred Ellis, photo.]

MR. JAMES ERSKINE,
"ARTHUR GOWER."
(*Engaged to Rose Trelawny.*)

MR. GERALD DU MAURIER,
"FERDINAND GADD."

MISS PATTIE BROWN,
"AVONIA BUNN."

MISS ISABEL BATEMAN,
"MISS TRAFALGAR GOWER."

MR. PAUL ARTHUR,
"TOM WRENCH."

MR. E. M. ROBSON,
"AUGUSTUS COLPOYS."

MISS IRENE VANBRUGH,
"ROSE TRELAWNY."
(OF THE BAGNIGGE-WELLS THEATRE.)

MR. DION BOUCICAULT,
"VICE-CHANCELLOR SIR WILLIAM GOWER, KT."
(*In whose house Rose Trelawny has been staying.*)

A SCENE FROM "TRELAWNY OF THE 'WELLS'": "TRELAWNY" WILL GO BACK TO THE STAGE!



MR. DION BOUCICAULT.



MR. ARTHUR WING PINERO.

TWO GENERATIONS: THE 'SIXTIES AND THE 'NINETIES.

Reproduced, by kind permission, from the "Vanity Fair" Cartoons.

"Bagnigge-Wells Theatre" is admitted to be none other than Sadler's Wells, and if the period he depicts is a somewhat later one—say 1863-4—we may assume, at least, that several of "Trelawny's" colleagues made their *début* in the days of Phelps. Mrs. Telfer, for instance, may at one time have been understudy to Mrs. Warner, that suburban Siddons—the kind-hearted woman, and popular actress, with whom Phelps was associated when he first took the theatre. Tom Wrench, we know (for Tom Wrench is—more or less—"Tom" Robertson, the dramatist of the 'Sixties), was one of Phelps's "general utilities"; sparkling Rose Trelawny herself, and impulsive, affectionate, sentimental Avonia Bunn, were, perhaps, his "soubrettes"; I doubt whether, among his "low comedians," he had anybody one-half so funny as the Augustus Colpoys of Mr. E. M. Robson!

Gustavus V. Brooke, that "unparalleled tragedian," as the Drury Lane managers called him, was a native of Dublin. It was in Scotland, however, that he first made his mark. Macready sent his agent to Aberdeen in 1842-3 to see him play, and engaged him for Covent Garden; but Brooke had been "smitten by a lady of Babylonian beauty, then sojourning in the granite city,"—so say the authors of "The Life of Phelps"—"and she, holding him fast in her toils, arrested his southward progress at Dundee." "One of the most promising careers," proceed the same writers, "was thus blasted. Never did young actor enter on the stage more richly endowed, and never did young actor throw his gifts more wildly to the wind. While under the witchery of his Circe he entered upon a series of intermittent orgies, which lasted for several years; and when he finally burst through her spells and appeared in London, his glorious voice, with all its marvellous sweetness, flexibility and power, was gone, and he spoke in the cracked and husky accents of a bacchanal. . . . The people of London, the States, and Australia never saw him at his best."

This description may be supplemented by the following passage from Lewes:

"Physically, then, Gustavus Brooke is the greatest tragic actor on

the stage, and as, except Phelps, all the other tragic actors known to me are not what I should call eminently intellectual, what I have just said amounts very much to saying that Brooke is, with that single exception, the greatest tragic actor on our stage. Nevertheless, he is 'a man who, take him for all in all,' I have no wish 'to look upon his like again.' The paradox of his success is intelligible as soon as one watches his audience. When he is violent—and he is magnificently violent, with a certain leonine, sometimes bovine, power—the audiences are in ecstasies. When he runs up his voice in alt, and drops to a double G, with the stretch of compass if not with the aplomb of an Alboni, the audiences are naïvely startled by the vocal feat, and, not troubled with critical misgivings as to sense, thoroughly give themselves up to the sensation, and thus a physical actor is applauded by a physical audience. The question of intelligence never comes into consideration."

Professor Morley had even less tolerance for Brooke's full-blooded histrionics. "Drury Lane," we find him recording on September 10th, 1853, in his "Journal," "has re-opened, and Mr. G. V. Brooke is for the present its chief attraction. It is a pity that he should prefer to act Shakespeare—for which he is as little qualified as the company engaged to support him—rather than a good, ranting, roaring melodrama, which he would play admirably. This would be infinitely better than making a melodrama of *Othello*."

But the actor met, and met bravely, a tragic end, and the kindly critic, in republishing his "Journal" thirteen years later, made what amends he could for his severity. "Mr. G. V. Brooke," he records in a footnote, "is said by all who knew him to have been most amiable and generous. He was drowned in the wreck of the 'London' (January 11th, 1866), after distinguishing himself in the last hours of danger and despair by higher qualities than actors have been often called upon to show. None laboured more strenuously to avert the deadly issue, which none bore when it became inevitable with more tranquil fortitude than he. Though he could not act Shakespeare, he must have been a noble fellow."



GUSTAVUS V. BROOKE AS "THE DUKE OF GLOUCESTER."

From an old engraving.

CHAPTER IX

The Stage in the 'Sixties

It seems to be generally agreed that the theatre in England reached its lowest ebb in the early 'Sixties. "I do not believe," says Mr. Clement Scott, in his "Thirty Years at the Play," "that ever before, and certainly, according to my experience, never since, has the English stage been in such a wretched, down-at-heel, untidy, and deplorable condition." The stage, Mr. Scott proceeds, was without a leader. Macready had bequeathed to his successors little but his worst faults and mannerisms. "The genius was gone: the growling and grunting remained behind!" Charles Kean had retired from the Princess's "a poorer and a sadder man." The death-knell had been tolled of Sadler's Wells, and "honest Samuel Phelps was struggling on without the loyal assistance of his faithful business partner, Tom Greenwood." The Olympic Theatre was the one bright spot to relieve the gloom, for on its boards the fitful fires of the great Kean seemed momentarily rekindled in the weird little body of Frederick Robson.

"What, little Bill gone!" a workman who had been associated with Robson in his early days is said to have exclaimed on hearing of the actor's death. "Ah, he was a merry lad, but he had better by half 'a' stuck to the bench." The workman said well. Robson's temperament resembled Kean's in its shadows no less than its lights. From the standpoint of happiness, "little Bill had better by half 'a' stuck to the bench."

The bench was at the establishment of Mr. Smellie, the copper-plate engraver, and printer of George Cruikshank's caricatures, in Bedfordbury Square, near Maiden Lane, Covent Garden. Here Thomas Robson Brownbill (to give him his real

name) was apprenticed in 1836, at the age of fifteen, and known familiarly by his mates as "Little Bill." He showed himself an original from the first, and his dress and deportment—a big hat with a twisted brim cocked sideways on his big head, his comical little body arrayed in wondrous costumes—were only less a delight than his exhibitions of mimicry and his comic songs. After four of his seven years of apprenticeship had run, his master removed to Scotland, and Robson set up shop on his own account in Bridges Street, close by, where he carried on business as a master-engraver for a year.

But he had always been more or less stage-struck (when a small boy he had seen Kean act), and soon a country engagement lured him away from his tools. It was in 1844 that, after some provincial wanderings, he reappeared in London at the Grecian Saloon in the City Road. He became popular at once, but it was not until he had visited Dublin and Belfast in the early 'Fifties and had returned to London to the Olympic in 1853 that he became famous. Here, as Macbeth and Shylock in burlesques by Talfourd, as Jem Baggs in *The Wandering Minstrel*, as Desmarets in *Plot and Passion*, as the Yellow Dwarf in Planché's burlesque pantomime, and as Medea, in which he imitated Madame Ristori, he made a sensation in the world of the theatre unequalled since Kean's appearance at Drury Lane. In 1857 Robson undertook the management of the theatre himself, in combination with two other actors, and, abandoning burlesque, devoted himself almost entirely to comedies and farces—among others, *Daddy Hardacre*, *Retained for the Defence*, *The Porter's Knot*—with touches of tragedy and pathos in them, and scope in every direction for his quaint and eccentric personality. But his powers early began to wane. He had worked so long and so hard without critical recognition that "when it came at last he could hardly believe," we are told, "in its reality." He was often haunted by the idea that there was some delusion in his success, and that his fall would be as sudden and as marked as his rise. He was very nervous, and his sufferings on a First Night were painful to behold. He took too little rest, and was too much the slave of excitement. Stimulants only increased the evil,



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

IN "THE CHIMNEY-CORNER."



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

IN "DADDY HARDACRE."



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

IN "THE PORTER'S KNOT."



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

IN "BOOTS AT THE SWAN."

SOME PORTRAITS OF "LITTLE ROBSON."

and the result was a broken-down man at forty. In 1864 he died.

There is a striking agreement between all the published accounts of Robson's acting. Let us begin with Mr. Scott's, from the entertaining little book already mentioned :

"My best memories, however, of Robson, the little genius, were in connection with 'half-price' at the Olympic. Half-price was a splendid institution for stage-struck lads who enjoyed a very limited supply of pocket-money, and the Olympic pit in those days was the best and most comfortable in London. Here, for the very modest expense of one shilling, you could see, from nine o'clock until eleven, two hours of the very best entertainment in all London, including the greatest genius that the English stage has seen since Edmund Kean. The only strictly serious part that I ever saw Robson play was Desmarets in *Plot and Passion*, a performance never to be forgotten; but his burlesque was on the very border-line of tragedy. Such intensity he had, such power of sudden contrast, such quick changes from seriousness to fun, that he electrified one. In an instant he had the whole audience in his grasp, and communicated to them his magnetic personality. . . . He was a very little man, but in his inspired moments he became a giant. He seemed to swell and grow before our eyes. When he lifted himself up, his rage was awful; when he wept, the whole house sobbed in sympathy."

It was on October 21st, 1853, that Robson appeared for the first time as Desmarets. Here is Professor Morley's account of the performance :

"The success of the night was undoubtedly the assumption of a serious part by the burlesque actor, Mr. Robson. That there would be other and higher things to report of a performer who, while other people were burlesquing reality, could put such a startling reality into burlesque, was not to be doubted. But one hardly expected it so soon. The part he plays in *Plot and Passion* (a drama of which the central figure is Fouché, its characters being the agents or objects of his villainy and its catastrophe his disgrace) is that of a mean, double-faced, fawning, cunning, treacherous tool, in whom the sordid passions have nevertheless not wholly extinguished others that place him finally at the mercy of his victims. Here the actor's opportunity is that of a constant and quick transition within the limited range of the emotions expressed; and from meanness to malice, from cringing humility to

the most malignant hate, from a cat-like watchfulness to occasional bursts of passion that seemed to defy control, Mr. Robson passed with a keen power and ready self-possession that never missed the effect intended to be produced."

And here, from an obituary notice in one of the London papers, quoted in a little sketch of his life published in 1866, is another vivid pen-portrait of the marvellous little man:

"In his apparently reckless drollery there was an undercurrent of passion whose strength and rapidity were amazing. You saw capering about the stage, absurdly clad, now mouthing tumid bombast, now chanting some street song, a strange figure—one of the quaintest of buffoons. Nothing more? Of a sudden, the actor would be in earnest; the eyes that had been winking with a knowing vulgarity, all at once looked you full in the face, mastered you at a glance; there was a passionate cry, a taunting shout, or a wail of utter heart-rending misery in the voice which had just been trolling a Cockney ditty; and then, ere your tears, so strangely surprised from you, were dry, the mime was again prancing or strutting, all the earnestness gone out of him, a mountebank, but one of bewildering and fantastic freaks, of swift and perplexing changes. What was this new phenomenon? Had the man mistaken his vocation? You could fancy for a moment, as you watched him, that from those lips there would come with a new force the terrible curse of Lear, or the miserable pleading of the broken king with his cruel daughters. Presto! and all was over—he was again a 'low comedian.' Wonderful were these transitions of his."

Here, finally, is a no less striking description from the pen of George Augustus Sala:

"New triumphs awaited him. In the burlesque of *The Yellow Dwarf* he showed a mastery of the grotesque which approached the terrible. Years before, in Macbeth, he had personated a red-headed, fire-eating, whisky-drinking Scotchman—and in Shylock, a servile, fawning, obsequious, yet, when emergency arose, a passionate and vindictive Jew. In *The Yellow Dwarf* he was the jaundiced embodiment of a spirit of Oriental evil; crafty, malevolent, greedy, insatiate—full of mockery, mimicry, lubricity, and spite—an Afrit, a Djinn, a Ghoul, a spawn of Sheitan. How that monstrous orange-tawny head grinned and wagged! How those flaps of ears were projected forwards, like unto those of a dog! How balefully those atrabilious eyes glistened! You laughed, and yet you shuddered. He spoke in mere doggerel and slang. He sang trumpery songs to negro melodies. He danced

the Lancashire clog hornpipe; he rattled out puns and conundrums; yet did he contrive to infuse into all this mummery and buffoonery, into this salmagundi of the incongruous and the *outré*, an unmistakably tragic element—an element of depth and strength and passion, and almost of sublimity. The mountebank became inspired. The Jack Pudding suddenly drew the *cothurnus* over his clogs. You were awe-stricken by the intensity, the vehemence he threw into the mean balderdash of the burlesque-monger. These qualities were even more apparent in his subsequent personation of Medea, in Robert Brough's parody of the Franco-Italian tragedy. The love, the hate, the scorn of the abandoned wife of Jason, the diabolic loathing in which she holds Creusa, the tigerish affection with which she regards the children whom she is afterwards to slay—all these were portrayed by Robson, through the medium, be it always remembered, of doggerel and slang, with astonishing force and vigour. The original Medea, the great Ristori herself, came to see Robson and was delighted with and amazed at him. She scarcely understood two words of English, but the actor's genius struck her home through the bull's-hide target of an unknown tongue. 'Uomo straordinario!' she went away saying."

The figure of Madame Ristori herself stands out so impressively in all theatrical chronicles of this time that, although her claim to be included in any record of the English stage is no greater than that of Rachel or Salvini, of Madame Sarah Bernhardt or Coquelin or la Duse, one cannot pass her by without a word.

"The art of tragic acting at the present day probably stands higher in Italy than in any other European country," says Professor A. W. Ward in the article upon the Drama in "The Encyclopædia Britannica," published in 1877. "If the tragic muse were to be depicted with the features of a living artist, it is those of Adelaide Ristori which she would assume." Ristori was, in truth, the Siddons of Italy—a less statuesque, less goddess-like, more womanly, more human Siddons—not quite so much of a genius, and more of a *grande dame*. That, at least, is the impression one forms of her from her photographs and from the pen-portraits drawn of her by her critics.

For an account of her performances in London it is to the untiring pen of Professor Morley that we must be indebted. He describes her Phèdre, her Adrienne Lecouvreur, her Mary

Stuart, her Queen Elizabeth. He contrasts her methods in the first three *rôles* with those of Rachel:

"The two actresses differ widely from each other. Rachel dazzled and startled us by flashing an electric life into words and lines. She was unrivalled in the power of giving an intensity of meaning to a single phrase. Madame Ristori has this kind of power, but she has it in a less degree; her excellence appears to lie in a clear artistic conception of each part she represents, a resolute subordination of every detail to the just working out of the central thought, and this not seldom to the sacrifice of stage effects easily produced, sure of applause, but false in taste."

The difference between the two actresses came out strongly in *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, in the recitation scene. Madame Ristori did not, "as the dramatist intended, and as Rachel acted the passage," work up to a grand stage effect by visible and bodily denunciation of her enemy. "When she begins, the Princess, to torture her the more, is toying and trifling with her lover." But Adrienne "hardly looks at her, she does not point at her by any discourteous outward sign, when suddenly she brands her in the poet's lines with all the force of her soul. Rachel was for most people the more effective, but unquestionably this is the finer reading of the situation."

In the poisoned bouquet scene Madame Ristori dwelt more on the spiritual than on the merely physical side of her agony. "The low, quick, unearthly cry with which she draws her face back from the box which she has just opened, when the scent of the poisoned bouquet rises from it and strikes death into her, is a marvellous dramatic sound, wholly distinct from the voice of misery that follows when she looks on the returned bouquet as an insult from the man she loved."

For Professor Morley's vivid descriptions of Ristori as Mary Stuart in the Italian verson of Schiller's play, and as "Elisabetta, Regina d'Inghilterra," in the drama by Signor Giacometti, I must refer you to his "Journal." Here I may quote, in conclusion, a passage from his account of her in *Fazio*, which suggests a resemblance to la Duse. "She is not the last speaker when she leaves the stage; but it is a rule with Madame Ristori never to quit the stage without making



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

CHARLES FECHTER.



W. and D. Downey, photo.]

MR. WILSON BARRETT.



W. and D. Downey, photo.]

MR. BEERBOHM-TREE.



W. and D. Downey, photo.]

MR. FORBES-ROBERTSON.

FOUR "HAMLETS."

a point as she does so, and Fazio's last words were a jesting reference to Aldabella (his first love). Bianca therefore turns towards him at her chamber door, and with two little parting gestures of the hand only—one representing playful but half-earnest warning, and the other trusting love—impossible to any English actress, natural to an Italian, sums up in two instants the meaning of the scene."

In 1860 Charles Kean was outshone in melodrama no less than in tragedy by Charles Albert Fechter, a French actor who had paid a first visit to London twelve years earlier, and who now took Kean's place at the Princess's. As Ruy Blas in an English version of Victor Hugo's drama; as the Corsican Brothers, whose personalities he differentiated with a subtlety beyond Kean's power; as Hamlet, his performance of which, Mr. Baker says, sounded "the death-knell of the traditional Prince of Denmark," this handsome, debonair foreigner—his imperfect English notwithstanding—conquered the town. Only his Othello failed, but this failed irredeemably. "His Hamlet," says Lewes, "was one of the very best, and his Othello one of the very worst, I have ever seen. On leaving the theatre after *Hamlet* I felt once more what a great play it was, with all its faults, and they are gross and numerous. On leaving the theatre after *Othello* I felt as if my old admiration for this supreme masterpiece of the art had been an exaggeration; all the faults of the play stood out so glaringly, all its beauties were so dimmed and distorted by the acting of everyone concerned. It was necessary to recur to Shakespeare's pages to recover the old feeling." His Iago, however, was excellent—an Iago after the fashion of Edmund Kean's, "a gay, light-hearted monster, a careless, cordial, comfortable villain."

Fechter's personality seems to have disqualified him for Othello; but, over and above this, he misread the character—read into it all kinds of perverse meanings. His performance of it seems, in the familiar phrase, to have been "too clever by half." Yet Lewes's criticism of it is not wholly convincing, though it is well worth reading. You will find it in "Actors

and Acting." I am not sure that the critic also is not "too clever by half."

But if disqualified for Othello, Fechter was physically an ideal Hamlet:

> "The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword,
> The glass of fashion, and the mould of form,
> The observed of all observers."

Here is Lewes's admirable description of him in the part:

"Fechter is lymphatic, delicate, handsome, and, with his long flaxen curls, quivering, sensitive nostrils, fine eye, and sympathethic voice, perfectly represents the graceful prince. His aspect and bearing are such that the eye rests on him with delight. Our sympathies are completely secured. All those scenes which demand the qualities of an accomplished comedian he plays to perfection. Seldom have the scenes with the players, with Polonius, with Horatio, with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, or the quieter monologues, been better played; they are touched with so cunning a grace, and a manner so *natural*, that the effect is delightful. We not only feel in the presence of an individual, a character, but feel that the individual is consonant with our previous conception of Hamlet, and with the part assigned to him in the play. The passages of emotion also are rendered with some sensibility. His delightful and sympathetic voice, and the unforced fervour of his expression, triumph over the foreigner's mistakes in emphasis. This is really a considerable triumph; for, although Fechter pronounces English very well for a Frenchman, it is certain that his accent greatly interferes with the due effect of the speeches. But the foreign accent is as nothing compared with the frequent error of emphasis. . . . The sense is often perturbed, and sometimes violated, by this fault. Yet so great is the power of true emotion that even this is forgotten directly he touches the feelings of the audience; and in his great speech, 'O what a rogue and peasant slave am I!' no one hears the foreigner.

"Physically, then, we may say that his Hamlet is perfectly satisfactory; nor is it intellectually open to more criticism than must always arise in the case of a character which admits of so many readings. It is certainly a fine conception, consonant in general with what the text of Shakespeare indicates. It is the nearest approach I have seen to the realization of Goethe's idea, expounded in the celebrated critique in *Wilhelm Meister*, that there is a burden laid on Hamlet too heavy for his soul to bear. The refinement, the feminine delicacy, the vacillation of Hamlet, are admirably represented; and it is only in the more tragic scenes that we feel any shortcoming. For these scenes he



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

FECHTER AS "OTHELLO."



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

FECHTER AS "IAGO."



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

CHARLES FECHTER.



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

FECHTER AS "ROBERT MACAIRE."

SOME PORTRAITS OF FECHTER.

wants the tragedian's *personality;* and, once for all, let me say that by *personality* I do not simply mean the qualities of voice and person, but the qualities which give the force of animal passion demanded by tragedy, and which cannot be *represented* except by a certain animal power." [1]

In 1863 Fechter took upon himself the management of the Lyceum, with Miss Kate Terry, the most charming and most talented actress of the time, as his chief support. There are many old playgoers, I dare say, who hold with Mr. Barton Baker that the era which preceded Irving's should be dated from this event. Mr. Baker calls Fechter "the Luther of the English stage." "It was under him," he declares, "that the great theatrical revival of our time was initiated. . . . He brought in a new order of things, sweeping away worn-out traditions. . . . He began by revolutionizing the stage itself, and thereby rendered possible such effects as we never before dreamed of. The ancient grooves, trap doors, and shaky flats were done away with, the flooring was so constructed that it could be taken to pieces like a child's puzzle, and scenery could be raised or sunk in any part, while all the shifting was done on the mezzanine beneath ; ceilings were no longer represented by hanging cloths, or the walls of a room by open wings, but were solidly built, the old glaring 'floats,' which used to make such hideous lights and shadows upon the faces of the performers, were sunk and subdued, and set scene succeeded set scene with a rapidity which in those days was regarded as marvellous." There is some exaggeration in all this, but it is not easy to apportion to the various managers of those days the exact amount of credit which may be their due for stage improvements. Macready was an innovator; so was Charles Mathews, and Charles Kean, and Dion Boucicault; and the Bancrofts were almost revolutionists.

Fechter opened with *The Duke's Motto*, an adaptation of a

[1] Another very interesting account of Fechter's Hamlet may be found in the pleasant "Green-Room Recollections" of Mr. Arthur Wm. à Beckett. Mr. à Beckett compares him in the *rôle* with Charles Kean, of whose impersonation he says disrespectfully that it "certainly strengthened the character of the daughter of Polonius—made it more probable. One felt that Ophelia *must* have been mad to have flirted with such a Hamlet."

play by Paul Féval, in which, over and above the "bright picturesque romance" of which it chiefly consisted, there was a special attraction to the "groundlings" in the form of a set "sensation" scene, in which the hero hauls himself up a rope, hand over hand, with a baby in his arms. "If the baby," says Professor Morley, "instead of being only a doll, were but a real live baby, with a decent chance of being dropped upon its head or squeezed to death, the piece might run till Christmas, 1866." Even without this "separate ecstasy," as Mr. Andrew Lang might call it, it was a great success, and Fechter was encouraged by its reception to produce another sensation drama in the following year, a piece entitled *Bel Demonio*—"all action, bounce, and conventional stage chivalry." These, perhaps, were his most popular achievements. In 1867 his management came to an end. In 1870 he went to America. In 1873 he retired to a farm near Philadelphia, and here, six years later, he died.

Joseph Jefferson, famous throughout the world as the impersonator of Rip Van Winkle, was born in Philadelphia in 1829. His earliest recollections, as he tells us in his autobiography, were of "a rickety old frame building with a broad gable facing on a wide avenue, and situated in the city of Washington." This was a small theatre of which his father —grandson of an actor whom Garrick had encouraged and befriended—was then manager. Whenever a small child was required upon the stage, young "Joe" was pressed into service—absolutely his first appearance being out of a carpet bag as a sort of surprise illustration to a stanza in "Jump Jim Crow."

As a child he must have seen many of the famous English players who "starred" the States, but his memories of the period were faint. The clearest were centred in the green room :

"In the green-room," he tells us, "there was a noble mirror. I loved to stand in front of it and act. But I was not alone in this. Many of the great players, long since passed away, have stood before this stately glass ; and often in the evening, when clad in my night-gown, I have escaped from the nurse, and stealing on tiptoe to the green-room door,



Falk, New York, photo.]

MR. JOSEPH JEFFERSON.

have peeped in and beheld these magnates with dignified satisfaction surveying themselves in their kingly robes: now a small man with piercing steel-gray eye, possibly the elder Booth; then a tall, gaunt figure, weird and majestic—Macready most likely; at another time a young and beautiful queen in white satin—this must have been Fanny Kemble; again a tall and graceful figure in a scarlet military coat, posing with an extravagant swagger and evidently admiring himself —undoubtedly Tyrone Power, the great Irish comedian."

It was as Asa Trenchard in *Our American Cousin* (the play which was afterwards to become so famous through Sothern's performance of Lord Dundreary, originally a minor *rôle*) that Jefferson first made his mark. During the Civil War he made a tour in Australia, appearing in *The Ticket-of-Leave Man* before audiences, as some one has remarked, not unfamiliar with tickets-of-leave. It was in 1865 that he made his appearance in London at the Adelphi Theatre, in Boucicault's *Rip Van Winkle*. Originally he had acted always in a far inferior version of Washington Irving's story by an American actor named Burke, but being dissatisfied with it, yet believing in the possibilities of the subject, he had entreated Boucicault to take it in hand. "This old sot is not a pleasant figure," Boucicault had said on acceding to the request and turning over the original Rip Van Winkle in his mind, "I would prefer to start him as a young scamp—thoughtless, gay, just such a curly-headed, good-humoured fellow as all the village girls would love, and children and the dogs run after." This seemed to Jefferson too thorough-going an alteration, and he demurred; but Boucicault persisted and had his way. "Well," proceeds the playwright himself in recounting the story, in 1883, "I wrote the play as he plays it now. It was not much of a literary production, and it was with some apology I handed it to him. He read it, and when he met me I said, 'It is a poor thing, Joe.' 'Well,' he replied, 'it is good enough for me.' It was produced. Three or four weeks afterwards he called on me, and his first words were, 'You were right about making Rip a young man. Now I could not conceive or play him in any other shape.'"[1]

[1] "The Critic," New York.

The new Rip was in truth an immense, an unparalleled success. Jefferson's performance in it was recognized at once, as it is still universally regarded by all who saw it, as quite marvellous. We who saw it not must be content to picture it by the light of the descriptions by those who did. I have read none so vivid as that which appeared in 1867 in "The Atlantic Monthly," in an article entitled "Among the Comedians": [1]

"From the moment of Rip's entrance upon the scene," it begins, "the audience has assurance that a worthy descendant of the noblest of the old players is before them. He leans lightly against a table, his disengaged hand holding his gun. Standing there, he is in himself the incarnation of the lazy, good-humoured, dissipated, good-for-nothing Dutchman that Irving drew. . . . The kindly, simple, *insouciant* face, ruddy, smiling, lighted by the tender humorous blue eyes, which look down upon his dress, elaborately copied bit by bit from the etchings of Darley; the lounging, careless grace of the figure; the low musical voice, whose utterances are 'far above singing'; the sweet rippling laughter—all combine to produce an effect which is rare in its simplicity and excellence, and altogether satisfying."

The scene, however, in which the real greatness of the player was shown is the last scene of the first act:

"It is marvellously beautiful in its human tenderness and dignity. Here the debauched good-for-nothing, who has squandered life, friends, and fortune, is driven from his home with a scorn pitiless as the storm-filled night without. The scene undoubtedly owes much to the art of the dramatist, who has combined the broadest humour in the beginning with the deepest pathos at the close. Here there is 'room and verge enough' for the amplest display of the comedian's power. And the opportunities are nobly used. His utterance of the memorable words, 'Would you drive me out like a dog?' is an unsurpassed expression of power and genius. His sitting with his face turned from the audience during his dame's tirade, his stunned, dazed look as he rises, his blind groping from his chair to the table, are actions conceived

[1] Included among a number of other interesting accounts of Jefferson's impersonations in "Actors and Actresses of Great Britain and the United States," volumes which I have laid under contribution also in dealing with Forrest and Edwin Booth. It seems curious that so notable a work should remain practically unknown in England. Even the London Library does not possess a copy.



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

EDWARD SOTHERN.

in the very noblest spirit of art. In a moment the lazy drunkard, stung into a new existence by the taunt of his vixenish wife, throws off the shell which has encased his better self and rises to the full stature of his manhood—a man sorely stricken, but every inch a man. All tokens of his debauchery are gone; vanished all traces of the old careless indolence and humour. His tones, vibrating with the passion that consumes him, are clear, and low and sweet—full of doubt that he has heard aright the words of banishment—full of an awful pain, and pity, and dismay. And so with one parting farewell to his child, full of a nameless agony, he goes out into the storm and the darkness."

Then comes the contrast between the young Rip and the old:

"The versatility of Mr. Jefferson's powers is finely shown in the scene of Rip's awaking from his sleep in the Catskills and in those scenes which immediately follow. Here he has thrown off his youth, his hair has whitened, his voice is broken to a childish tremor, his very limbs are shrunken, tottering, palsied. This maundering, almost imbecile old man, out of whose talk come dimly rays of the old quaint humour, would excite only ridicule and laughter in the hands of an artist less gifted than Mr. Jefferson; but his griefs, his old affections, so rise up through the tones of that marvellous voice, his loneliness and homelessness so plead for him, that old Lear, beaten by the winds, deserted and houseless, is not more wrapped about with honour than poor old Rip, wandering through the streets of his native village."

Those who would know more of Jefferson's achievements as an actor, and attractive personality as a man, should read his "Autobiography," an exceedingly interesting book.

The career of Edwin Askew Sothern bears a marked resemblance to that of Jefferson. Born in 1830, he achieved the one great success of his life in 1858, becoming thenceforth identified almost exclusively with the *rôle* he created. But their achievements, of course, were not on the same plane: Lord Dundreary was to Rip Van Winkle, one may say, as a caricature by Pellegrini to a portrait by Rembrandt.

The story of the evolution of Lord Dundreary has been well told by Mr. Lester Wallack,[1] son of James Wallack,

[1] Reproduced as an appendix to Mr. Baker's "The London Stage."

himself an actor of talent and repute. The play had been accepted by Miss Laura Keene, an American actress-manageress, whose company included both Jefferson and Sothern. Being at a loss for a stop-gap piece, pending the production upon an ambitious scale of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Miss Keene resolved to utilize it. To Sothern she allotted the *rôle* of Lord Dundreary, a part of forty or fifty lines, "a sort of second old man," as the actor regarded it. He protested, but Miss Keene was persistent. "Well, Miss Keene," he said at last, "I have read the part very carefully, and if you will let me 'gag' it and do what I please with it I will undertake it, though it is terribly bad." Miss Keene consented.

"And then," proceeds Mr. Wallack, "Sothern set about to think how he should dress it. That was a time when the long frock-coat was in fashion, a coat that came down almost to the heels, and was made like what is now called an Albert coat, a coat that 'Punch' took hold of and caricatured unmercifully. It happened that Brougham" (another popular actor of those days) "had borrowed from me the coat in which I played the Debilitated Cousin in *Bleak House*, and with true Irish liberality, and without thought that it was the property of somebody else, he generously lent it to Sothern, and that was the garment in which Sothern first appeared as Lord Dundreary. Jefferson was the star; but as the play went on, week after week, Asa Trenchard became commonplace, and up came Lord Dundreary. Sothern added every night new 'gags'; he introduced the reading of Brother Sam's letter, etc., until at last nothing else was talked of but Lord Dundreary. After Sothern had worn it pretty well out here, he went to London. On the first night *Our American Cousin* made such a dead fiasco at the Haymarket that Buckstone put up a notice in the green-room: 'Next Thursday, *She Stoops to Conquer*.' Charles Mathews, who was in front, went behind and said, 'Buckstone, you push this piece.' 'But it is an offence to all the swells.' 'Don't you believe it,' cried Mathews; 'you push it, and it will please them more than anybody else.' Buckstone was induced to give it further trial, and the consequence was four hundred consecutive nights. Sothern told me that Buckstone cleared £30,000 by it."

Sothern acted Lord Dundreary at the Haymarket four hundred and ninety-eight times. In America his performances of it had numbered no less than eleven hundred. In 1864 he made his second hit as David Garrick, in the play produced



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

EMERY IN "THE DUKE'S MOTTO."



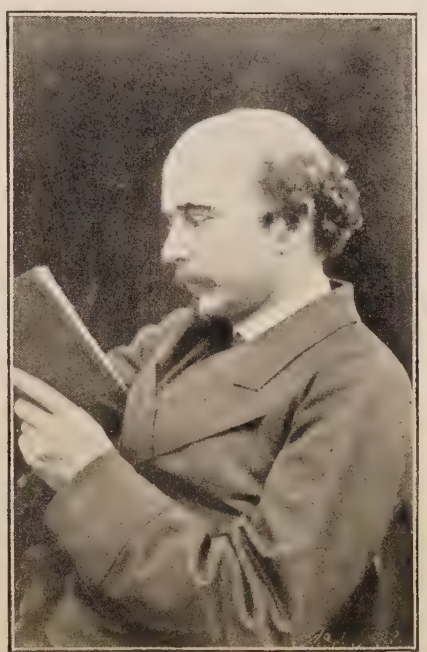
Adolphe Beau, photo.]

H. WIDDICOMB.



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

H. COMPTON.



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

DION BOUCICAULT.

SOME COMEDIANS OF THE 'SIXTIES.

so successfully by Mr. Wyndham at the Criterion of recent years. It is a poor play—an unskilful adaptation from the French—but the title-*rôle* offers plenty of scope for an actor's powers, and Sothern, like Mr. Wyndham, made the most of it. In 1867 Sothern played Dundreary in Paris, Henry Irving being an obscure member of his company. In 1874 he visited London once again, appearing without much success in various new *rôles*. In 1878 he returned to America. In 1881 he died.

Dion Boucicault, the adapter of *Rip Van Winkle* and author of four of the most popular plays of the century, *London Assurance*, *The Colleen Bawn*, *Arrah-na-Pogue*, and *The Shaughraun*, produced respectively in 1842, 1860, 1865, and 1875 (and the father of the clever Dion Boucicault of to-day), was an actor as well as a dramatist. His dearest object and, as most people are agreed,[1] his principal achievement, in both capacities, was to substitute for the old-fashioned stage Irishman a figure more nearly resembling the real thing—to give a truthful portraiture of Irish character. He put his heart into his Irish plays and set himself successfully to win the heart of his English audiences. As Myles-na-Coppaleen, in *The Colleen Bawn*, he was only less irresistible than his wife as poor Eily O'Connor, "with her little red cloak, her long black hair, and her expression, half sad, half seductive—smiling through her tears like an angel in disgrace."[2]

Boucicault wrote some scores of plays in all, mostly pla-

[1] But there are, of course, dissentients. The critic of "The Times" (September, 1860) saw nothing in Myles-na-Coppaleen but the "plebeian Irishman of scampish tendencies, who alternates native shrewdness and pathos after a fashion familiar to those who are accustomed to the theatrical Hibernian"; while Mr. George Bernard Shaw, as he told us in an amusing criticism of the excellent revival of *The Colleen Bawn* at the Princess's Theatre in 1896, regards Myles as a deliberate imposture upon the Saxon, and at the same time as an unwitting libel upon the race which (one gathers) finds a sort of "common denominator" in the personalities of Mr. Shaw himself and the Duke of Wellington. But then, as they put it in Ireland, Mr. Shaw "says more than his prayers."

[2] M. Filon in "The English Stage."

giarisms. But they were defensible plagiarisms as a rule. Mr. George William Curtis, in one of his charming "Easy Chair" criticisms in "Harper's Magazine," many years ago, evolved out of his inner consciousness the kind of methods to which Boucicault sometimes had recourse. Mr. Curtis has been giving expression to his own delight in *The Shaughraun*. It seemed to him "a poem, a romance," its effect increased by Boucicault's resourcefulness in stage management, above all by the "faint breath from the orchestra—a waft of wild, pathetic Irish melody, filling the mind with vague sadness and sympathy, and the scene with a nameless pensive charm." He proceeds:

> "But as you sit and watch and listen, you become more and more aware that the keynote of the whole play is very familiar. . . . Under a wholly different form, under circumstances entirely changed, in another time and country, and with a myriad divergences, *The Shaughraun* is our old friend *Rip Van Winkle*. . . . The motive of the two dramas is the same—the winning vagabond. In the earlier play he is more indolent and dreamy, and the human story naturally fades into a ghostly tale; in the latter he is heroic and defined, and acts only within familiar and human conditions. As a study of the fine art of play-writing, you can easily fancy, as the performance proceeds, that an accomplished playwright, pondering the great and true and permanent success of *Rip Van Winkle*, may have set himself down to pluck out the heart of the mystery and to win the same victory upon another field—poring upon Jefferson's impersonation of the character that he created, studying it with a talent of infinite resource . . . and gradually reproducing, under a wholly new and foreign form, the fascination of a spell that is peculiar to no country or clime, but inherent in human nature."

Edwin Booth is perhaps the most striking instance of inherited genius in the history of the stage. As his father had been America's greatest tragedian in the first half of the century, so he was in the second. Born near Baltimore in 1833, he was already famous when he visited England in 1860. He was rising rapidly, in fact, to that foremost place in the affections and esteem of his countrymen which he won by his fine character no less than by his brilliant gifts, and which he held so long.



London Stereoscopic Co., photo.]

EDWIN BOOTH.

A Shakespearean actor *par excellence*, Edwin Booth has yet become identified with the part of Richelieu in Bulwer Lytton's play more closely than with any other. Here, from an article by Mr. Edmund Clarence Stedman in "The Atlantic Monthly," is an interesting reference to his impersonation of the character:

"Bulwer's *Richelieu*, though written in that author's pedantic, artificial manner, and catching the groundlings with cheap sentiment and rhetorical platitudes, is yet full of telling dramatic effects, which, through the inspiration of a fine actor, lift the most critical audience to sudden heights. One of this sort is justly famous. We moderns, who so feebly catch the spell which made the Church of Rome sovereign of sovereigns for a thousand years, have it cast full upon us in the scene where the Cardinal, deprived of temporal power and defending his beautiful ward from royalty itself, draws around her that Church's 'awful circle' and cries to Baradas:

> 'Set but a foot within that holy ground
> And on thy head—yea, though it wore a crown—
> *I launch the curse of Rome!*'

Booth's expression of this climax is wonderful. There is perhaps nothing, of its own kind, to equal it upon the present stage. Well may the king's haughty parasites cower and shrink aghast from the ominous voice, the finger of doom, the arrows of those lurid, unbearable eyes!"

Of his Hamlet and his Othello, in these early days, M. E. W. Sherwood gave the following account in "The New York Times." M. E. W. Sherwood is evidently a woman—an Irishwoman, one suspects. Like the lady in "The Egoist," she throws out her lively remarks "to be apprehended, not dissected":

"Booth, in his first season of *Hamlet*, is a very romantic recollection. He was the ideal of the part to many; his natural melancholy, his great magnetic eyes, and his beautiful reading, gave him a host of admirers. I remember well, in the first year of our war, when we were profoundly miserable and frightened, what a relief it was to go and see Booth in *Hamlet*. In some passages he was superb. He gave the play a new rendering, fresh and admirable. When I first saw Fechter in it, whom I liked infinitely less than Booth, I wondered anew at the genius of Shakespeare, who could have written two such different and distinct Hamlets.

"Mr. Booth gave a new feeling to the relation to Ophelia. You felt, when you saw him play it, that Ophelia was a poor creature; that if she had been grander, nobler, and more of a woman, the play need never have been written. I afterwards saw him in *Othello*, and against all sounder criticism I pronounce *that* his very greatest part, greater than his Iago, greater than his Hamlet, greater than Salvini's Othello, because infinitely less terrible, and shall I say less brutal? for, though I am an *adorer* of Salvini, I did find the last scene of his Othello *brutal*.

"Booth's Othello was the very spirit of Venice. It was the Middle Ages. It was the Orient. It was all that is delicious in the land of gold and pearl—of silks from Damascus, perfumes from Persia. It was Moorish, it was the Adriatic and its history. I do not know anything which brought all the reading of a lifetime before one so forcibly. That dark face, to which the Eastern robe was so becoming, seemed at once to be telling its mighty story of adventure and conquest. It was a proud, beautiful face. Desdemona was not worthy of it."

Yet one other American actor, John S. Clarke, calls for mention in this chapter.[1] Born, like Booth, at Baltimore, and in the same year, 1833, he was often associated with the tragedian (whose sister he married) in his stage career. But he was himself a comedian pure and simple—a modernized Munden, one gathers from the descriptions of his acting. He appeared in London for the first time in 1867 at the St. James's Theatre, in the part of Major Wellington de Boots—an exuberant militia major, a sort of English Tartarin—which he had acted in America already over a thousand times, over two hundred and fifty times in New York alone. This was one of his chief hits, but he was capable of better work,

[1] The period of the 'Sixties is still so near us that it is not easy to see it in correct perspective. So far, I have been safe: Robson and Madame Ristori, Fechter and Miss Kate Terry (though of her, as we have her still happily among us, it was needless to say much), Dion Boucicault and Jefferson, Sothern and Clarke and Edwin Booth—these are figures, all of them, as to whose prominence there can be no question. But, at this point, were I to pass on to the actors of lesser note—Compton, the Wigans, Barry Sullivan, among others innumerable—I should not know where to begin or where to stop. I must content myself with shifting some of my burden on to the willing shoulders of M. Adolphe Beau, whom you will find stepping out gaily under it in Appendix I.



Adolphe Beau, photo.]



Adolphe Beau, photo.]



Adolphe Beau, photo.]



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

MISS ADELAIDE NEILSON.

and Fechter declared that he was an English Frédéric Lemaître—an actor of whom Fechter himself was held by some critics to be an imitator. One peculiarity of Clarke's acting is noted by all his critics—a habit of subsiding suddenly into gloom, "like a wag," as "The Athenæum" put it, "who had forgotten himself and made a joke at a funeral." This characteristic has been well described by Mr. Percy FitzGerald. He has been referring to the English actor, John Clarke, a member of Marie Wilton's company at the Prince of Wales's:

"But of the twin Clarke—J. S.—what is to be said? Such an emollient face, surely such rich enjoyment and fun, is seldom seen. The rapidity with which the changes are made, the return from boisterous laughter to instant gravity—in this he is unique. A favourite device of his is known to us all; a sort of chuckling is going on, the unctuous face is rippling in waves of enjoyment, he is getting familiar, when some remark is made—an allusion to a wife of whom he is in awe—when in a second a livid terror fills his face. His eyes roll, his lips take an O shape, as if anxious to form words but cannot, his cheeks become red and distended, he seems hot with alarm."

The year 1865 is made notable in theatrical annals by two interesting events: the *début* of Miss Adelaide Neilson, as Juliet; and the assumption by Miss Marie Wilton—the future Lady Bancroft—of the cares and responsibilities of theatrical management.

Miss Neilson was then a girl of seventeen, of obscure origin. She had drifted into London from her country home and had taken service as a barmaid near the Haymarket. John Ryder, it was, who trained her for the stage. Though she attracted notice from the first by her charm and beauty, it was not until the 'Seventies that she reached the height of her success. She would seem from most accounts to have been a bewitching, rather than a great actress. Mr. Joseph Knight, it is true, dissents from this general opinion. "As a tragedian," he says, "she has had no English rival during the last half of this century." But even "National Biographers" are susceptible to witchery!

She was clearly a witch, *par excellence.* Here is a portrait of her, drawn from memory by the pen that told the tale of

"Lady Bonnie's Experiment." Mr. Tighe Hopkins, I found, was one of the many whose heart's affections (in his boyhood) Miss Neilson had won; and I thought her features would come readily to his hand. He assured me he remembered nothing that it would be worth while to write, and then wrote the very thing for which I asked him. It makes a pretty companion picture to that of Madame Vestris by Westland Marston, given upon an earlier page.

"I cannot, with the best wish to serve you, recall anything of importance about Adelaide Neilson. She was one of the prettiest Rosalinds ever seen on the stage of the old Haymarket. Her reading of the part would not, of course, compare with Mrs. Kendal's, for she was neither a very finished nor a resourceful actress, and she lacked Mrs. Kendal's fine intelligence. But she was winsome and tender and sunny, and her wonderful Italian eyes seemed to single out for a roguish glance each particular member of the audience. She dressed the part, I remember, to give every effect of grace to a figure seductive in every curve; a figure rather for the brush, perhaps, than for the chisel. She won New York (as far as my remembrance goes) as she had won London, by her extreme beauty, which had something soft and kind about it, and by a sweet coquettishness of manner on the stage, which was never too familiar and never in the least immodest. A sensuous charm pervaded her which never approached the sensual."

"The youth, the grace, the charm, the glow" that once were Adelaide Neilson's were extinguished nearly twenty years ago. A sad death in Paris ended a life in which there had been too much of sadness. With her, we shall say good-bye to the players of the past. There is but one formula for a farewell to them—Mr. Henley's "Ballade of Dead Actors":

"Where are the passions they essayed,
And where the tears they taught to flow?
Where the wild humours they portrayed
For laughing worlds to see and know?
Othello's wrath and Juliet's woe?
Sir Peter's whims and Timon's gall?
And Millamant and Romeo?—
Into the night go one and all!"



Adolphe Beau, photo.]



Adolphe Beau, photo.]



Adolphe Beau, photo.]



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

SOME EARLY PORTRAITS OF LADY BANCROFT.

Lady Bancroft—or, rather, Marie Wilton—was born at Doncaster. Her father, "a handsome, thoughtless, kind-hearted Bohemian," according to her own account of him, had drifted on to the stage after making a trial of several other professions. It was from him and from her mother that little Marie learned her first notions of acting and elocution. She was still a mere baby when she began her stage career, reciting Shakespeare and Milton before she had learned to spell. The sleep-walking scene in *Macbeth*, the trial scene in *The Merchant of Venice*, the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, Satan's Address to the Sun—these were some of the pieces which she lisped to the delight of provincial audiences throughout the country. These "infant phenomenon" exhibitions do not seem to have made her in any way famous; but from the moment of her first serious performance, in *Belphegor*, produced by Charles Dillon, first at Bristol and afterwards in London at the Lyceum, her talents met with recognition from the most eminent actors and critics, Dillon himself being as kind to her as he was appreciative. Acting once, when about eleven, as the boy Fleance, in *Macbeth*, with Macready, she was sent for at the close of the performance by the great tragedian, who kissed her, made her drink a glass of wine, gave her a sovereign, and remarked, pointing to her eyes, that he could see genius through those little windows, and sent her on her way, as may be imagined, the happiest and proudest little person in existence. Shortly after this, as Prince Arthur in *King John*, she won the admiration of Charles Kemble, expressed in the words "That girl will be a great actress"; and Dickens, seeing her in the boy's part of Pippo, in *The Maid and the Magpie*, wrote an enthusiastic account of the performance to John Forster, declaring that she was the cleverest girl he had ever seen upon the stage.

It was at the Strand Theatre as Pippo, as Myles in *Miss Eily O'Connor*, a travesty of *The Colleen Bawn* (the *rôle* in which we see her in two of these old photographs), and in numerous other "principal boys'" parts in burlesques—H. J. Byron's, amongst others—that the name of Marie Wilton first became famous, and she was still very young—hardly of age,

indeed—when she made up her mind to have a theatre of her own. Only one theatre was possible for her, her capital amounting but to £1,000, lent by her brother-in-law. This was the shabby little building in Tottenham Street, "a place of entertainment," as M. Filon puts it, "where all sorts of things had been achieved, but bankruptcy oftenest of all," where "the aristocratic seats were a shilling, and where the stalls, when they had dined well, were given to bombarding the boxes with orange peel." It was popularly known as "The Dust Hole." This squalid little play-house she set herself to transform, and soon it was the neatest and prettiest and most popular in London.

Here she got together an excellent company. It included, says M. Filon, in a pleasant passage, which I may give in full,

> "... Byron, John Clarke, transplanted from the Strand, Fanny Josephs —an actress of delicate and agreeable talent, the excellent *duègne* Larkin, and two other sisters Wilton. It included also a tall young man of twenty-four who had not previously acted in London, and who was not therefore of any interest to the public, though to his manageress he was; his name was Bancroft.
>
> "He was a gentleman by birth, breeding, and bearing. But, his family being ruined, he had followed the vocation which led him to the stage. In four and a half years he had played four hundred and forty-six *rôles*. In one engagement of thirty-six days in Dublin he had played forty. This hard life as a provincial comedian had broken him in to his business. Tall and slender, he owed a sort of air of distinction, combined with stiffness, to his short sight and to his stature. The rendering of cool, well-bred nonchalance came naturally to him, but in the depth of his eye there lurked a gleam of irrepressible humour. He had spent much time in observing and reflecting, he knew much more of things than did his colleagues, and he felt vaguely conscious of possessing qualities which had only to be drawn out. And now fortune, in the guise of a young girl, had come to him and taken him by the hand."

They began with a production of H. J. Byron's, but this proved unsatisfactory, and in November, 1865, "Cup and Saucer" Comedy came into life with T. W. Robertson's first play, *Society*. It was a great success, and was followed in due course by very similar successes: by *Ours* in September,



Window and Grove, photo.]

KENDAL, LADY BANCROFT AND ARTHUR CECIL
IN "THE VICARAGE."



Window and Grove, photo.]

BANCROFT, KENDAL AND CLAYTON IN "DIPLOMACY."

TWO WELL-REMEMBERED SCENES.



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

MRS. STIRLING IN "HEN AND CHICKENS."



Window and Grove, photo.]

MR. JOHN HARE AS "PRINCE PEROSKY" IN "OURS."



Window and Grove, photo.]

LADY BANCROFT AND J. CLARK IN "OURS."



Window and Grove, photo.]

LADY BANCROFT AND MR. ARTHUR CECIL IN "THE VICARAGE."

SOME SOUVENIRS OF THE 'SIXTIES.



Window and Grove, photo.]

LADY BANCROFT AS "LADY FRANKLIN," AND MR. ARTHUR CECIL AS "MR. GRAVES," IN "MONEY."

1866; by *Caste* in April, 1867; by *Play* in February, 1868; by *School* in January, 1869; by *M.P.* in April, 1870. This was the last of the series. In 1871 Robertson died.

The Bancrofts (for they had become man and wife in December, 1867) remained on at the Princess's until 1879, their company becoming strengthened gradually[1] by new recruits, the Kendals above all. In 1872 their production of Lord Lytton's *Money* (in the recent revival of which at the Garrick Lady Bancroft was so delightful and Mr. Arthur Cecil so exquisitely funny—who can resist the expression of Mr. Graves's face in this excellent photograph?) drew the comment that a nearer approach was being made at the Prince of Wales's to "that *ensemble* it is the boast of the Comédie Française to encourage" than had yet been achieved on the English stage. In 1874 *The School for Scandal* was, in every sense of the word, revived. It was a performance, from all accounts, that Sheridan would have rejoiced in. Mrs. Bancroft's Lady Teazle was received with acclamation. Bancroft's Joseph Surface—like Mr. Forbes-Robertson's, so recently—was the polished, handsome, insinuating rascal for whom Lamb looked in vain upon the stage of his time. In 1875 came *Masks and Faces*, in which actor and actress were at their best. Bancroft has never, surely, surpassed his Triplet; and Lady Bancroft's Peg Woffington may be held the most perfect of her performances. It called forth all her gifts—her charm, her gaiety, her humour, her tenderness, her pathos. Its memory is a delight.

It would be pleasant to linger over the story of the Prince of Wales's, but I have no excuse for doing so. Who is there that has not become acquainted with it already through the Bancrofts' own "Reminiscences"? And there is yet one other figure to claim our attention: the figure—now, to the regret of all of us, becoming less and less familiar—of that oldest and best of our comedians, John Lawrence Toole.

[1] But weakened by the departure of Mr. Hare, who had made a brilliant *début* as Lord Ptarmigant in *Society*, and had added immensely to his reputation by his Prince Perovsky in *Ours* and his creation of Sam Gerridge in *Caste*.

Charles Dickens, the discoverer, in a sense, both of Lady Bancroft and of Sir Henry Irving, was also the discoverer of Mr. Toole. It was Dickens who advised him to quit his City desk and to embrace the calling in which he was to shine so brilliantly for over forty years. In 1859—after some successful touring in the provinces as well as in Ireland and Scotland—Mr. Toole appeared for the first time in the *rôles* in which he has attained his highest mark as an actor—*rôles* in which his humour was blended with pathos, and in which he set his listeners not merely "laughing till they cried," but crying also in real earnest: the *rôles* of Bob Cratchit in *The Christmas Carol*, and of Caleb Plummer in *The Cricket on the Hearth*. It is impossible here to recall the countless comedies and farces in which Mr. Toole appeared during the 'Sixties and the 'Seventies. His achievements in them won him a notable tribute from Lord Rosebery, on the occasion of a farewell banquet to the comedian prior to his first visit to America; Toole's humour, he declared, was "grateful alike to age and to youth and to childhood—to the genius and to the fool."

In this case, also, there is no need for me to hold forth at any length, for in the "Reminiscences of J. L. Toole"—"related by himself and chronicled by Joseph Hatton"—the story of his career has been made known to all the world. In this entertaining volume, one of the few really amusing works of the kind that one has read, we see Mr. Toole in every phase of his personality; we see him studying character in the slums; bewildering elderly gentlemen by feigned recognitions; playing practical jokes upon his friends; now presiding over a banquet in aid of the Theatrical Fund; now breakfasting with Mr. Gladstone—and buttonholing a policeman immediately afterwards "to bring himself down to the level of ordinary life"; day-dreaming in his dressing room, surrounded by the portraits of his colleagues, old and new; descanting pleasantly upon his art; enjoying to the full all the delights of his happy home; bearing up manfully against the sorrows that rendered it desolate; ever the same genial, delightful, inimitable Toole.



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

MR. J. L. TOOLE IN THE 'SIXTIES.

CHAPTER X

The Era of Irving

Whatever faults, reader, you may have found with me so far (perhaps, by judicious "skipping," you have minimized the occasion for fault-finding), you will acquit me, I trust, of the vanity of having set up to be a historian, or anything more than just the "play-lover" I called myself upon the title-page. You will not have been misled, therefore, by the heading of this chapter into expecting from me a comprehensive and original survey of the history of the English stage during the last three decades. Even if I had the qualifications for such a task, the limits of my space would forbid me to attempt it here. It would be as impossible for me to tell the story of "The Era of Irving" in a single chapter as it was to epitomize it in a single paragraph.

On the other hand, it is obvious that I cannot deal with the players of the present after the fashion in which I have been dealing with the players of the past. In the first place, it is unnecessary: the actors of the time of Phelps and of Macready, of Kean and of the Kembles, you could see but through the eyes of contemporary playgoers; the actors of our own time you have seen for yourself. In the second place, there are too many of them! We can convince ourselves of this by glancing for a moment at the theatrical roll of fame for the year 1892.

It may be found in a carefully compiled and brightly written little volume entitled "The Dramatic Peerage," the work of Mr. Erskine Reid and Mr. Herbert Compton.[1] More than two hundred and fifty names—most of them familiar to us all

[1] "Que diable allait-il faire dans cette galère?"—the author of those stirring stories of fighting and adventure, "A King's Hussar" and "A Free Lance in a Far Land"!

—are included in this theatrical directory, this Buskin "Burke." Let us glance at those under A and B. We begin with Mr. W. L. Abingdon—"This popular Adelphi villain"; Miss Janet Achurch comes next, "the first English actress to introduce Ibsen's heroines to the English stage." Then come: Miss Carlotta Addison, who appeared in London for the first time in 1866, at the St. James's Theatre; Miss Annie Albu, whose name is less familiar; Mr. George Alexander—"This enterprising actor-manager" (born, it seems, in 1858, and therefore in very deed this year "A Man of Forty"); Mr. Allan Aynesworth; and Miss Margaret Ayrtoun. The B's are more numerous—there are more than thirty of them. They include the famous names of Bancroft, Barrett, Brough, and Boucicault; Shiel Barry, the Miser in *Les Cloches de Corneville;* Mrs. Bernard-Beere; Mrs. Brown-Potter; Mr. Kyrle Bellew; Miss Olga Brandon; Mr. J. D. Beveridge; Mr. Leonard Boyne; Miss Phyllis Broughton; Miss Rosina Brandram; Miss Leonora Braham; and, finally—for I need not transcribe them all—Miss Lucy Buckstone, daughter of the renowned comedian "who lost a fortune and made all playgoers his friends by his management of the Haymarket Theatre."

And this, mind, is the "Peerage" of six years ago. How many players have risen to the front rank since then!—Mr. Herbert Waring, Romanticist and Realist—now the absurd husband of one of Ibsen's heroines, now a hero, Gil de Bérault, after the heart of the great Dumas; Miss Evelyn Millard, who, as Princess Flavia and as Lady Ursula, in the first two plays of the brilliant novelist who yet may prove himself our most brilliant dramatist,[1] has realized so charmingly two such different ideals—the one gravely beautiful, the other "a dainty

[1] This off-hand prophecy is based, of course, not merely upon *The Prisoner of Zenda*, dramatized by Mr. Edward Rose, and upon *The Adventure of Lady Ursula*, Mr. Anthony Hope's sole unaided effort, so far, in theatrical art: it is based, rather (rightly or wrongly—time will tell!), upon his books; more especially, upon "Father Stafford," an early volume of his, too little known—essentially a comedy; and upon "Simon Dale," that gay and gallant historical romance—from beginning to end dramatic—in which the legendary wit and winsomeness of Nell Gwynne have ceased at last to be a legend.



W. and D. Downey, photo.]

MISS EVELYN MILLARD AS "PRINCESS FLAVIA" IN "THE PRISONER OF ZENDA."



Alfred Ellis, photo.]

MISS DOROTHEA BAIRD AS "TRILBY."



Alfred Ellis, photo.]

MR. GEORGE ALEXANDER. MISS FAY DAVIS.

A SCENE FROM "THE AMBASSADOR."

rogue in porcelain"; Miss Dorothea Baird, in whose gracious person du Maurier, like a modern Pygmalion, saw his *Quartier Latin* Galatea miraculously come to life; Miss Fay Davis; Miss Irene Vanbrugh; Mr. James Welsh; Mr. H. V. Esmond; Miss Sydney Fairbrother; Miss Louie Freear.

Above all, Miss Louie Freear! Those of my readers who did not see Miss Louie Freear as the "slavey" in *The Gay Parisienne*[1] have a page lacking from their book of experience. Mere words will not serve to bring her home to them. Let them imagine, if they can, a gnome-like, pale, pinched girl-face, prematurely old and preternaturally sly, a shapeless little figure, with flat chest and sloping shoulders, and a pair of enormous feet bulging out of their elastic-side "Jemimas"—an uncanny, pathetic little object at first sight, but so whimsical, so humorous, so irresistibly mirth-provoking, and all the time enjoying herself so thoroughly, so tremendously, that your first feeling of pity completely evaporated in a moment, and you, too, could join—*had* to join—in the fun! But she baffles description. Lewis Carroll might have invented her, and Alice have consorted with her "Behind the Looking Glass."

It is equally clear, then, by its entries, as by its omissions, that "The Dramatic Peerage" is not to be emulated in the following pages. I must find some *via media* between biography and criticism. I may best begin by asking the questions: "How does the English stage stand to-day? How does it compare with the stage of yesterday?"—questions that every writer upon the stage has set himself; and by selecting and collating a few of the many and various replies. I shall cite only those critics whose writings are accessible in volume form—life is too short for expeditions into the back-files of newspapers.

To begin with Mr. Barton Baker. It is just twenty years

[1] I did not see Miss Louie Freear in *Oh, Susanna!*, her performance in which evoked memories of "Little Robson" in the minds of many playgoers. "The popular history of the English stage for the next ten years," according to Mr. Bernard Shaw, "will be the history of Miss Louie Freear and Mr. Dan Leno."

since Mr. Baker published the interesting volumes entitled "Our Old Actors," to which I have referred so often; and just ten years since he published his still more valuable work, "The London Stage." His views at these two dates, 1878 and 1888, will be of interest—they are the views, perhaps, of an ardent playgoer, steeped in the traditions of the "old school," rather than of a skilled critic abreast of the ideas of the time. Here is his deliverance, in the concluding chapter of "Our Old Actors," upon the stage in the 'Seventies:

> "Our theatre is in a transition period, slowly emerging from the utter ruin and degradation in which it was prostrated some ten to fifteen years back by burlesque and sensation, and *dramatically* it stands in a far higher and healthier position than it did then, as would at once be obvious to any person who took the trouble to compare the play-bills of that period with those of the last two or three seasons, but *histrionically* we are in an even worse plight; many actors have disappeared during the last twenty years whose places still remain vacant. To instance a few—Mr. Phelps, Henry Marston, Buckstone, Compton, Charles Mathews, Webster, Frank Matthews. Where are their successors? The very lines of business they represented seem to have died with them. The light comedian, the old man [Mr. Baker, in a footnote, makes an exception in favour of Mr. William Farren], the low comedian, as far as the highest excellence is concerned, have disappeared. There is not a low comedian on the stage who can excite a laugh by genuine humour, or by anything save utter buffoonery; a few grimaces and mouth-twistings, a few mannerisms repeated *ad nauseam* in every scene and every part, make up what is called comic acting at the present day."

In 1888 Mr. Baker writes in a somewhat similar spirit: "Without sharing Mr. Irving's opinion," he says (it is clear, of course, that Sir Henry's utterance upon the subject must be absurdly travestied), "that we have still Bettertons and Garricks amongst us, no person can deny that we have many excellent actors and actresses." There is "no tragedian," he proceeds, "after the model of Macready or even Phelps." The "low comedian," as represented by Wright and Buckstone, lived "only in Mr. Toole, and in him only in a modified form." And, while acknowledging the talents of Mr. Wyndham, Mr. Lionel Brough, and Mr. Tree, Mr. Baker continues to lament

AN EARLY PORTRAIT OF MISS ELLEN TERRY.

From a photograph by Window and Grove.



the complete disappearance of that old order of comedian of which Mr. Farren in 1878 remained the only representative.

Mr. Baker's opinions are, as I have implied, those of a *dilettante* rather than of an expert. Let us place in juxtaposition with them the opinions of Mr. Archer in 1886 and of Mr. Knight in 1893.

"The *play's* the thing" with Mr. Archer, not the players. In the characteristically strenuous study of the state of the English stage a dozen years ago, which forms the opening chapter of his book, "About the Theatre," he devotes but a single page to the histrionic side of the question. The criterion of advance or retrogression in theatrical art is to be found, he holds, in the plays produced, not in the actors who perform them. The average of histrionic talent remains always, he thinks, about the same. "From the days of Betterton downwards, the stage," he says, "has never been without an ample complement of admirable actors. . . . We have now one very distinguished actor, Mr. Henry Irving; one really great actress, Mrs. Kendal; and a whole host of admirable melodramatic actors, character actors, and comedians."

From the "good seat in the pit, pretty well front," which, like Walt Whitman at that performance of the elder Booth's, I am sometimes fortunate enough to secure upon First Nights, I have had many opportunities for studying the demeanour of the critics in the stalls. Mr. Knight, I have always thought, looks like an incarnation of the judicial spirit upon these occasions. As befits one who combines with the duties of theatrical contributor to "The Athenæum" those, more important still, of theatrical historian to "The Dictionary of National Biography," Mr. Knight is pre-eminently a judge. It is not "impressions" that he is there to give us, nor studies of *états-d'âme,* nor records of his "soul's adventures among masterpieces," like critics of the temperament of M. Lemaître and Mr. Walkley, but judgments: wise, well-informed, masculine, scholarly, clear, not intolerant (nor yet infallible) judgments.

In "Theatrical Notes," published in 1893, we have a first series of these "Athenæum" judgments. They cover the

years 1874-79. In his introduction to this volume Mr. Knight makes some interesting comments upon the evolution of the English stage during the thirty years of his experience. You will do well to read it for yourself. Here I shall quote but a few sentences.

The one great improvement which he detects is in the matter of what the French call *l'ensemble*—that cohesion, that playing up together, which is as essential to a theatrical company as it is to a football fifteen; Charles Kean's conception of an ideal company, Mr. Knight reminds us, used to be said to consist of himself, "Ellen,"[1] and a *corps de ballet;* "Webster's surroundings were not seldom contemptible . . . such a thing as *ensemble* was undreamt of and unknown." This improvement he attributes to French influence—the frequent visits of the Comédie Française (driven over here in the first instance by the Franco-German War), and of the companies of the Gymnase-Dramatique, the Vaudeville, the Palais Royal, and of half-a-dozen other theatres. But credit is due also to the Bancrofts' exertions at the Prince of Wales's and to the object lessons provided in 1881 by the Saxe-Meiningen company.

As regards individual performers, Mr. Knight seems inclined to support Mr. Barton Baker. We have none, he says, superior to Benjamin Webster as a melodramatic actor, or to Phelps or Charles Kean as tragedians, or to Helen Faucit; though, taking it as a whole, the general standard stands much higher than it did.

This would seem to indicate that Mr. Knight's attitude towards Irving has not changed much since, in 1876, he referred to the tragedian's curiously limited popularity—every great actor, of course, has had his supporters and his censors, but, as Mr. Knight points out, the case of Irving (in those days, for many if not most of Mr. Knight's colleagues have since then been converted) is extreme:

"A sight such as is now presented is quite unprecedented in stage history, and is worth taking into account by those who study the age

[1] Miss Ellen Tree (Mrs. Kean).



Window and Grove, photo.]

IRVING AND MISS ELLEN TERRY IN "OLIVIA."



Barrauds, photo.]

MR. CHARLES WYNDHAM AS "DAVID GARRICK."



Elliott and Fry, photo.]

MR. JOHN HARE AS "BENJAMIN GOLDFINCH" IN
"A PAIR OF SPECTACLES."



London Stereoscopic Co., photo.]

MR. WILLARD AS "PROFESSOR GOODWILLIE" IN "THE PROFESSOR'S LOVE-STORY."



Soper and Stedman, photo.]

MR. EDWARD TERRY AS "DICK PHENYL" IN "SWEET LAVENDER."

in its various manifestations. We have here a man whom a large portion of the public, and by no means the least cultivated section, receives as a great actor. The manifestations are, moreover, such as we read of in the case of the greatest of his predecessors, and contain that mixture of admiration and personal regard which men like Kean and Kemble were able to inspire in their admirers. Yet criticism holds itself aloof, discontented and unsympathetic, and the actor's own profession, though it is, of course, sensible of merit, fails to partake of the enthusiasm of the public. It seems almost as if the kind of critical analysis which the characters of Shakespeare have received had so raised the standard of excellence that it is impossible for an actor, however clever and sympathetic, to fulfil all requirements."

It may not be out of place (in any case it will be interesting) to quote here Mr. Knight's welcome to the genius of Ellen Terry—that genius of which her Irish admirers said recently that it is "fatal to criticism, for it turns critics into lovers."[1]

The occasion of Mr. Knight's sympathetic estimate, and not too erroneous prophecy, was that of Miss Terry's impersonation of Pauline in *The Lady of Lyons*, August 14th, 1875, at the Princess's Theatre.

"It is too early yet to gauge fully the talent that has revealed itself. It seems possible that Miss Terry's powers will be restrained to depicting the grace, the tenderness, and passion of love. In the short scene of the third act, in which Pauline chides her lover for treachery, the actress scarcely rises to the requisite indignation. Limiting, however, what is to be hoped from her within the bounds indicated, what chance is there not afforded? Juliet in the stronger scenes would be, we should fancy, outside the physical resources of the artist. Beatrice, Rosalind, Viola, Imogen, Miranda, and a score other characters, of the most delicate and fragrant beauty are, however, all within what appears to be her range. In the present state of public feeling respecting the Shakespearean drama, it will be strange indeed if some manager does not take the opportunity of mounting some of those plays for which her talent is so eminently adapted."

From Mr. Knight it is natural to turn to his oldest colleague, Mr. Clement Scott. Comparisons need not be odious, and Mr. Bernard Shaw of all people (for it is not his cue as a rule to

[1] In an Address presented by the Lord Mayor of Dublin on the occasion of her latest visit to Ireland.

be amiable all round to everybody) has drawn a comparison between Mr. Scott and two other prominent critics of to-day, which manages to be piquant and amusing, without, I think, being odious.[1] Mr. Shaw has paid a just tribute to Mr. Archer's annual volume of reprinted criticisms, "The Theatrical World." (He has, perhaps, for the purposes of antithesis, exaggerated about Mr. Archer's "classical method," for Mr. Archer, also, like Fuzzy-Wuzzy, is "a first-class fightin' man," but that does not matter.) Here is the end of the passage:

"Indeed none of us would reprint as well as Mr. Archer. Mr. Clement Scott is as incapable as I am of keeping out of a scrimmage: he is an agitator, an advocate, a champion, a man of enthusiasms and generosities, abhorrences and defiances, always, of course, within the limits imposed by his experience, his responsibility, and his conscience. Mr. Walkley is a scoffer, a banterer, he treats the theatre *de haut en bas*—and serve it right!—but one does not need a Snubbing Annual. And nobody else cares enough about the theatre to spend ten times more thought on it than it is worth. So Mr. Archer will stand on the shelves with Genest when we are all buried in extinct newspapers and happily forgotten."

Mr. Scott, I imagine, will not complain of this description of him. But of course it is not complete. It should be added, for one thing, that he is essentially a man of moods. His is that sanguine temperament that runs to extremes. Sometimes he is an optimist, sometimes a pessimist. But he is generally a fighter for the ideals of the generation just gone by—the generation of his friend "Tom" Robertson—his own generation. In all those "scrimmages" it is almost always his own contemporaries and his own affinities that he backs up—cheering them, inciting them, as I dare say he was wont to cheer and incite his schoolfellows on the football fields of Marlborough, with strong-lunged shouts of "BRAVO, OUR SIDE!"

In the following outburst, extracted from his "Wheel of Life," published, I think, in 1893, Mr. Scott is in one of his pessimistic—or shall I say his discontented?—moods:

"How easy it is to get a hornet's nest about your ears by telling the simple truth about the art you love, and to which you have devoted

[1] "The Saturday Review," June 5th, 1897.



Mendelssohn, photo.]

MISS ELIZABETH ROBINS IN "THE MASTER BUILDER."



Barrauds, photo.]

MR. CYRIL MAUDE AND MISS WINIFRED EMERY AS "GAVIN DISHART" AND "BABBIE" IN "THE LITTLE MINISTER."



Alfred Ellis, photo.]

MISS MARY MOORE.



Alfred Ellis, photo.]

MRS. TREE.

the constant study and attention of a lifetime. Not long ago—in another place, as they say in the House of Commons—I happened to remark—and it is perfectly true, and I defy anyone to gainsay it—that just now the English stage is singularly destitute of artists of the first class: artists of power, passion, and intensity: artists who have studied their art, and continue to study and practise it with devotion, earnestness, and care. I went on further, and said that the hands of our best dramatists are, in a measure, tied, for the very simple reason that what they conceive cannot, as matters stand, be executed; that their ideas cannot have their proper fruition. Every country in the world suffers at one time or another from the same inevitable misfortune. Genius does not grow up in the night like mushrooms. It is a rare plant indeed. But what I most earnestly desired to say, not from any personal motive whatever, but for the sake of the art in which we are, one and all, so interested, was that it is the cruellest injustice to the stage, and to dramatic art, to deck out the showy and clever amateur in the grand robes of genius, and to mistake for first-class art and inspired genius the showy goods of the clever but often ill-instructed amateur."[1]

There are, of course, many people (whose opinions, if expressed in private conversation, Mr. Scott would listen to with respect) who take a far more favourable view of the present state of histrionic art, but in print Mr. Scott won't hear of contradiction. Listen to him on Mr. Tree's Hamlet—a performance that did not, indeed, commend itself to so many as the more recent Hamlet of Mr. Forbes-Robertson, but that won an unstinted eulogy in "The National Review" from so skilled a critic as Mr. H. D. Traill—one of the most brilliant journalists among Mr. Scott's contemporaries—and that was regarded by thousands (I may claim to be one of them) as an extremely interesting and attractive impersonation:

[1] Our theatrical authorities are singularly unappreciative, are they not?—Mr. Archer, perhaps, excepted. But it is needless to seek words to combat their pronouncements: "Si *argumentum* requiris, circumspice!" These portraits—records of so many brilliant impersonations—refute them. Turn them over, one by one: Irving as Dr. Primrose, Miss Ellen Terry as Olivia, Mr. Wyndham as David Garrick, Mr. Hare as Benjamin Goldfinch, Mr. Terry as Dick Phenyl, and all the rest! These actors not superior to the actors of thirty years ago! The English stage "destitute of artists of the first class"! Out on these critics of the last generation!

"I have seen the gentleman who played Hamlet act with consummate art to admiration a character that suits him. But he is a master of character and eccentricity. As an actor he is certainly of the first class, but Hamlet is not in his nature. Romance is outside his province. Verse is not his medium. Where he would be effective and interesting he becomes dull, monotonous, and commonplace. Is it so wonderful, after all, that an actor who might make a first-class Iago or Iachimo might make a second-class and uninteresting Hamlet? For, after all, these are not my opinions alone, they are shared by thousands of students of the stage who say over the dinner and supper table what I have the courage to say in print."

The discussion which led up to these remarks arose, Mr. Scott tells us, "on the acting in Mr. John Davidson's fine version of Coppée's *Pour La Couronne.* Nothing could have been better," he continues, "than the performances of Mr. Forbes-Robertson and Mr. Charles Dalton. But it did seem strange that all the army of English actresses could not produce one to convey the snaky subtlety of Militza or the splendid dramatic power of Bazilide." Here, again, Mr. Scott assumes that there is simply no room for disagreement. "The Daily Telegraph" "locuta est, causa finita est." But as a mere matter of fact, how many people, critics of note amongst them, were filled with admiration for Mrs. Campbell's Militza! Does it *never* occur to Mr. Scott that *sometimes* he may be wrong? A critic of thirty years' standing, his love and study of theatrical art, his long experience, his fire, his enthusiasm, his "go," have won him the admiring attention of his thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, of listeners. But we are none of us infallible—not even "The Largest Circulation."

Not even Mr. Archer! The case of Mrs. Campbell reminds me of the worst of Mr. Archer's occasional lapses into dogmatism.[1] "Shakespeare's tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* was

[1] They are *only* occasional. Readers who do not happen to be familiar with Mr. Archer's criticisms, and who know him only by his more controversial articles in the monthly reviews, will find a series of pleasant surprises in store for them in any of the five annual volumes of "The Theatrical World." In these invaluable books, Mr. Archer, the strenuous advocate, the unrelenting dialectician—the dogmatist, as some, but not I, would call him—gives

MRS. PATRICK CAMPBELL AS "JULIET."

From a photograph by W. and D. Downey.





W. and D. Downey, photo.]

MR. FORBES-ROBERTSON AND MRS. PATRICK CAMPBELL IN "ROMEO AND JULIET."

mounted, costumed, recited, and applauded at the Lyceum on Saturday evening," he wrote in "The World" for September 25th, 1895—"acted and enjoyed, it was not. Many people, no doubt, will contradict this from their own experience, saying, 'I enjoyed it!—And I!—And I!' They must allow me in that case to assure them that they do not begin to realize the sort of pleasure which *Romeo and Juliet* can and ought to give them. No doubt they enjoyed the pretty stage pictures, and the gallant bearing of Mr. Forbes-Robertson, and the graceful, gazelle-eyed helplessness of Mrs. Patrick Campbell; while here and there perhaps a familiar line of Shakespeare fell pleasantly on their ear. Their sum of agreeable sensations may have been considerable, but it certainly did not include the thrill of pity and terror,[1] the quickening of the pulses, the exaltation, the delight, which belong to a true revival of the loveliest lyric and swiftest, vividest drama in our language." And he proceeds to criticise the performance in its every feature, with the sole exception of Mr. Nutcombe Gould's Friar Lawrence—curiously enough, to some of us, its sole defect!

Now to me, as to many playgoers more experienced and more critical than I—including at least *one*, Mr. A. B. Walkley, whom Mr. Archer holds in high esteem, and, I think, another, Professor Brandes, whom he venerates — Mrs. Campbell's Juliet was a delight. To my own feelings I gave expression at the time, but my hastily written screed is not worth reprinting. Mr. Walkley, I trust, will not grudge me the pleasure of transcribing his instead; his enthusiasm is the more notable, that his attitude towards the stage could be described, as it was by Mr. Shaw, as *de haut en bas*. He has referred to the

place, for the most part, to Mr. Archer, the enthusiastic play-lover, the "impressionist," the philosopher, the wit. There is something almost absurd in the idea which prevails, one finds, among those who have not really read him, that Mr. Archer is cold and academic, and appreciative of naught but Ibsen. I could refer you to scores of passages in his various books, full of lively raillery or fervid admiration or cordial encouragement.

[1] For once Mr. Archer and Mr. Scott saw eye to eye! "A Juliet without a jump!" was the climax to the condemnation of it in "The Daily Telegraph."

well-known tradition that an actress cannot *act* the part of Juliet until she is too old to *look* it:

"After the Lyceum performance on Saturday night that tradition, at any rate, must go by the board. Here is Mrs. Patrick Campbell, with her child's face, her black eyes and raven locks, her mere slip of a body, to all seeming not a month over the fourteen years the text allots to her, and, what is more, far more, with the child's simplicity of mien, with every index of a child's heart. Listen to her in the balcony scene; the soft words of love pour from her lips like the babble of a brook, she says she knows not what, filled with the sweet, vague mystery of the divine thing that is in her heart. She leans forward, far forward, till her hair tumbles down so as almost to touch Romeo, and murmurs in tones so true, so heartfelt, that they send a thrill through the hushed house—'Dost thou love me?' . . . It is the child in Juliet that makes her the sweet figure that she is, and Mrs. Patrick Campbell gives us—as no other actress has given us—the child in Juliet. There, for me, is the beginning and end of the matter; so that a more delicious embodiment of Juliet than this I do not hope to see."

There are thousands, I am sure, who can subscribe to every syllable of this whole-hearted eulogy; and to those who did not themselves witness the performance, there is something in these words, I think, that will carry conviction. One knows by instinct, generally, when admiration is wrongly given. The theatrical *dilettante* of a hundred years hence, who may turn over these pages at the British Museum, will accept this passage, I imagine, as we accepted those in which Lamb and "The Old Playgoer" sang the praises of the players of their time.

Do so, Casual Reader of 1998! Do so, without hesitation! Don't mind Mr. Archer! Mrs. Campbell's Juliet was not, indeed, the ideal of our dreams, but it was a charming, moving, beautiful reality—an impersonation worthy to take rank beside the Imogen of Miss Ellen Terry and the Rosalind of Miss Ada Rehan as one of the most exquisite, one of the most memorable, of our time.

The Imogen of Ellen Terry, the Rosalind of Ada Rehan—what is one to say of them? It were wiser to say nothing.

MISS ADA REHAN AS "ROSALIND."

From a photograph by W. and D. Downey.



To recall the first, at least, no words are needed. Look only at the enchanting portrait that graces the place of honour in this book! To re-illumine your memories of the second, my own resources are inadequate. I must borrow my lightning; and from whom can I do so better than from Mr. Bernard Shaw, like Miss Rehan, a native of, and exile from, Ireland? Here, extracted from a back number of "The Saturday Review," where lie hidden so many of the liveliest, wittiest, pleasantest[1] pages ever penned about the English theatre, is Mr. Shaw's characteristic tribute, half bantering, half blarneying, to the genius of his (and my) most brilliant countrywoman. He begins, as is his wont, by putting the over-rated—or, rather, wrongly-rated—Master William Shakespeare in his proper place:

"If *As You Like It* were a typical Shakespearean play, I should unhesitatingly declare Miss Rehan the most perfect Shakespearean executant in the world. But when I think of those plays in which our William anticipated modern dramatic art by making serious attempts to hold the mirror up to nature—*All's Well*, *Measure for Measure*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and so on—I must limit the tribute to Shakespeare's popular style. Rosalind is not a complete human being: she is simply an extension into five acts of the most affectionate, fortunate, delightful five minutes in the life of a charming woman. And all the other figures in the play are cognate impostures. Orlando, Adam, Jacques, Touchstone, the banished Duke and the rest play each the same tune all through. This is not human nature or dramatic character: it is juvenile lead, first old man, heavy lead, heavy father, principal

[1] Yes, "pleasantest," though they consist so largely of onslaughts and diatribes, for the humour that pervades them prevents their hurting. Mr. Max Beerbohm has told us that Mr. Shaw's retirement from his post as critic has eclipsed the gaiety of green rooms; and Mr. Beerbohm is an authority upon the subject, for he knows "every actor-manager in London," and has, besides, a brother on the stage. I wish I had space for a comparison of Mr. Shaw's antiseptic methods and the rankling finikinism of Leigh Hunt. Mr. Shaw has declared that he does not see how any theatrical critic, engaged all his life in making personal remarks about the most sensitive of his fellow creatures, can pretend to be a gentleman. Such a reflection (expressed, of course, with whimsical and deliberate exaggeration) would never have occurred to Leigh Hunt. One is inclined to comment on it, reversing the old axiom: "Qui s'accuse s'excuse."

comedian and leading lady, transfigured by magical word-music. The Shakespeareolators who are taken in by it do not know drama in the classical sense from 'drama' in the technical Adelphi sense. You have only to compare Orlando and Rosalind with Bertram and Helena, the Duke and Touchstone with Leontes and Autolycus, to learn the difference from Shakespeare himself. Therefore I cannot judge from Miss Rehan's enchanting Rosalind whether she is a great Shakespearean actress or not: there is even a sense in which I cannot tell whether she can act at all or not. So far, I have never seen her create a character: she has always practised the same adorable arts on me, by whatever name the play-bill has called her—Nancy Brasher (ugh), Viola, or Rosalind. I have never complained: the drama with all its heroines levelled up to a universal Ada Rehan has seemed no such dreary prospect to me; and her voice, compared to Sarah Bernhardt's *voix d'or*, has been as all the sounds of the woodland to the chinking of twenty-franc pieces. In Shakespeare (what Mr. Daly leaves of him) she was and is irresistible: at Islington on Monday she made me cry faster than Mr. Daly could make me swear. But the critic in me is bound to insist that Ada Rehan has as yet created nothing but Ada Rehan. She will probably never excel that masterpiece; but why should she not superimpose a character study or two on it? Duse's greatest work is Duse; but that does not prevent Césarine, Santuzza and Camille from being three totally different women, none of them Duses, though Duse is all of them. Miss Rehan would charm everybody as Mirandolina as effectually as Duse does. But how about Magda? It is because nobody in England knows the answer to that question that nobody in England as yet knows whether Ada Rehan is a creative artist or a mere *virtuosa*."

It is the case of Dora Jordan and Jack Bannister over again. Turn back the pages for a moment and re-read what Hazlitt and "The Old Playgoer" wrote of them: how Bannister "shone through his parts and lighted them up like a transparency"—how no one else could play those parts so well, "because no one else could play Jack Bannister"; how Mrs. Jordan charmed as *herself* and by her voice—that voice that was so "rich, round, full, clear, and yet so soft! . . . I know the simile is stale," cries "The Old Playgoer," "but to nothing can I compare it but the full notes of the nightingale when May's moons are brightest and her young flowers sweetest."

There may be more—we *know* there is more, much more

—behind. But Miss Rehan hides it in those Nancy Brashers and Countess Guckis, and the like. It is melancholy. We owe Mr. Daly a debt of gratitude for introducing to us so often his excellent "Company of Comedians," but his frittering away of Miss Rehan's genius is nothing less than a crime.

"Sow an act," goes the saying, "and you reap a habit." In the preceding chapters I lived by borrowing, and here, when I should be self-supporting, I am borrowing still. There are three other prominent players of to-day whom I am tempted to present in the words of others.

The transition to the first of them, Mr. Kendal, is made natural by the mention of Jack Bannister; for Mr. Kendal is nothing if not a personality—less rich, less marked than Bannister's, but distinct, individual. He is always himself: if he were not, he would be nobody. And what he is to-day he was twenty years ago. Here, from the pen of Mr. Joseph Knight, is a brief definition of his qualities and his defects as they were to be noted in 1875, which, *mutatis mutandis*, might have been written last week. Mr. Knight has been condemning his unnatural and uncomfortable Orlando:

> "Few modern actors can present better than he the joyous and *débonnaire* youth of an artificial state of society. He has, however, nothing about him of the Céladon. So soon as sentiment has to be displayed, or the "clouded cane" exchanged for a crook, the self-consciousness that seems ingrained in the modern English actor develops itself and he becomes formal and ill at ease."

For "the joyous and *débonnaire* youth" substitute "the accomplished and attractive man of the world," and you have in these half-dozen lines an excellent thumb-nail sketch of the Mr. Kendal of to-day.

Mrs. Kendal, like Miss Ellen Terry, would require a volume all to herself. The first chapter would take her from her birth, in 1848, and her two earliest performances—as the Blind Child in *The Seven Poor Travellers* at the Marylebone Theatre, at the age of four, and as Eva in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, at the Bristol

Theatre, at the age of seven—to her *début* at Drury Lane in 1867 as Edith in *The Great City*. The second would deal with her career at the Haymarket in the early 'Seventies—her appearance in Mr. Gilbert's forgotten (or neglected ?) comedies, her irresistible Galatea, and that performance of hers as Mrs. Van Brugh in *Charity*, which, according to "The Daily Telegraph," "made a dull English audience leap to its feet and wave hats and handkerchiefs." Chapter III., a short one, would tell of her brief sojourn at the Opera Comique and at the Court (under Mr. Hare). Chapter IV. would begin with the Prince of Wales's and *Diplomacy*, and go on to the experiment in management at the Court. Chapter V., the most important of all, would be entitled simply "The St. James's," and would include the period at which she is described by Mr. Archer as the one great actress of the English stage.

This brings us to Chapter VI., "America, and After," in which the following passage from Mr. Archer's "Theatrical World," for 1893, could hardly fail to be quoted, though whether with approval or the reverse would depend upon the temperament of the biographer. To me it seems an excellent blend of friendly criticism and sincere admiration.

"The habit of driving home her effects in vast theatres, populated with playgoers who like their art on the vast American scale, has converted her from a delightful comedian, a mistress of unforced humour and pathos, into a powerful melodramatic actress, impressive at her best moments, stagey—there is no other word for it—at her worst. Her delivery of the words 'Sophia, Prrrincess Karatoff,' in the last act of *The Silver Shell*, was like a breath from 'the Palmy Days,' wafted by some phonographic miracle across our namby-pamby end of the century. I begin to see a second career opening out before Mrs. Kendal. She has all the makings of a fine tragic actress. If we are to have a Lady Macbeth, a Volumnia, a Constance in the present generation, Mrs. Kendal is the woman. Having been our Mrs. Jordan, why should she not become our Mrs. Siddons? But meanwhile the transition stage is somewhat trying. Tragedy (more or less) in modern dress, and speaking very third-rate modern prose, is not tragedy but melodrama. I insert the above qualifying parenthesis, as I think of the cloak which Mrs. Kendal manipulates so magnificently in the fourth act of *The Silver Shell*. It was the pall of



Window and Grove, photo.]

MR. AND MRS. KENDAL IN "DIPLOMACY."

tragedy without the sceptre. Not otherwise must Clytemnestra have handled her draperies. And this general effect of emphasis and sublimity, which would have been very much in place in a drama 'presenting Thebes or Pelops' line, Or the tale of Troy divine,' was a little out of keeping with the modern, even the melodramatic, surroundings. One felt that, Nihilist or no, the chivalrous Sir Richard Stanhope was undertaking rather a 'handful.' It was like going bail for the good behaviour of Medea or Lucrezia Borgia. 'Sophia, Prrrincess Karatoff,' seemed the sort of woman who was bound to blow up somebody, and one had a horrible presentiment that, if it was not the Czar, it would certainly be the Baronet. For my part, I felt quite a glow of admiration for his intrepidity."

The blots on the sun so playfully indicated by this observant watcher of theatrical skies have since disappeared; and in the tenderly written (if far from faultless) comedy, *The Elder Miss Blossom*, which is now being performed at the St. James's Theatre, Mrs. Kendal has once again revealed the fullness of her powers, once again to be hailed by her admirers—many critics among them—as "Our Greatest Actress." Chapter VII. has begun brilliantly!

"It has become a proverb," said Dr. C. A. Pearson, in 1893, in the course of his pessimistic reflections upon the mental and moral conditions of the British race, in his book on "National Life and Character," "that Shakespeare spells ruin; the exceptions to this are where popular actors give the stage version, more or less infamously garbled, with such gorgeousness of costume and surroundings that the mind is diverted from the words to the presentation." And his lamentations have just been re-echoed by another observer (hardly less studious, though in a less professional spirit) of the life and character of nations—by Mark Twain. "What *has* come over us English-speaking people?" cries out to his countrymen the humorist-moralist, fresh from a performance of *The Master of Palmyra* at the Burg Theatre in Vienna. During the first half of this century tragedies and great tragedians were as common with us as farce and comedy; and it was the same in England. Now we have not a tragedian, I believe,

and London, with its fifty theatres, has but three, I think."[1] And in the intervening years many other writers have uttered similar complaints.

And in reply, it is vain to point to the Lyceum and to Her Majesty's. Irving is Irving and Miss Ellen Terry Miss Ellen Terry, so we flock to Shakespeare at the Lyceum, almost as readily as we flock to Wills; but how many of Shakespeare's plays has Sir Henry produced? Mr. Forbes-Robertson, doubtless, had he a theatre of his own, would make his way through the Shakespearean repertory from end to end; but then the theatre is lacking. *Julius Cæsar*, at Her Majesty's, for all its merits, would not entirely escape Dr. Pearson's strictures: it was a gorgeous rather than a great performance. One answer we have, and one only, to these condemnations—an answer too seldom thought of, or at least too seldom given: LOOK AT MR. BENSON!

Some of my critics will have thought that in my chapter on the 'Fifties I did but scant justice to Phelps's historic management at Sadler's Wells: I wonder how many would have blamed me had I left Mr. Benson entirely unmentioned?

Yet Mr. Benson has been doing in the provinces, these fifteen years past, what Phelps did at Sadler's Wells. We who live in London know little more of him than that he produced several of Shakespeare's plays at the Globe Theatre in the winter of 1889-90, with the most praiseworthy conscientiousness and taste—his very play-bills being, in their way, works of art. Here, from the pen of my friend, Mr. Walter

[1] "The Forum," October, 1898. *The Master of Palmyra*, Mark Twain explains, is a kind of modern mystery play—a dimly connected procession of dream-pictures, an awe-inspiring figure of Death prominent in each: "Wherever there was a turmoil of merry-making or fighting or feasting or chaffing or quarrelling, or a gilded pageant or other manifestation of our trivial and fleeting life, into it drifted that black figure with the corpse-face, and looked its fateful look and passed on, leaving its victim shuddering and smitten." The drama was written twenty years ago, by Wilbrandt, and is played only in Berlin and at the Burg Theatre in Vienna. "You are trying to make yourselves believe that life is a comedy," concludes Mark Twain, "that its sole business is fun, that there is nothing serious in it. . . . Send for *The Master of Palmyra*."



Chancellor, photo.]

MR. AND MRS. BENSON AS "HENRY V." AND "KATHARINE OF FRANCE."

Shaw-Sparrow,[1] one of his early colleagues, are some interesting details as to his career, written at my request.

It began at a time, says Mr. Sparrow, when the British middle classes still clung to their own dull fireside, still proof against the play-house, with its lurid melodramas and bad burlesques. But Matthew Arnold had begun to make the English play-lover examine his conscience, and Mr. Benson was one of the results.

"Fourteen or fifteen years ago," proceeds Mr. Sparrow, "when Benson started out on his tour through the provinces, it seemed ridiculous that he, a little-known young actor, should try to avoid failure with a Shakespearean company of amateurs. For all that, he was not so Quixotic as he was supposed to be. The very fact that his company was made up of amateurs, all highly educated and full of enthusiasm, was a great point in his favour. Intelligent people had become weary of the old school of Shakespearean actors, with its slavish adherence to tradition and its mouthing elocution; and for this reason the aim which Mr. Benson set before himself was that of going away from the bad methods stereotyped by that school. Naturalness was to take the place of artificiality; each part was to be acted thoughtfully and brightly; and Mr. Benson himself, with a modesty very rare on the stage, gave everybody a fair chance of winning a success quite equal to his own. The company, it is true, needed a good stage manager; but good stage managers were not to be found then, and even to-day there are few. All the greater credit then is due to the self-restraint which the best of our provincial critics have so often noticed and praised in the bright, vivacious acting of Mr. Benson and his school.

"I make use of the word school because Mr. Benson has never allowed his company to become something more than a training academy of dramatic art. He might easily have given us a variety of players like the Saxe-Meiningen Company; and it is not easy to understand why he has not. It seems but a thankless task to train actors and actresses merely in order that London managers may profit by their talents. But it is also thankless to find fault with one who has put on the provincial stage nearly all of Shakespeare's plays, teaching an ever-increasing number of theatre-goers to think, to feel, and to respect themselves. This is the work which Mr. Benson has done, and is still doing, and he has never received much encouragement from the

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[1] Writer of an article on "Goethe as a Stage Manager," in "The Nineteenth Century" for 1897 (vol. 42), which attracted wide attention.

profession which has derived so much benefit from his labours and self-sacrifice. Even the London critics, during his short season at the Globe Theatre in 1889-90, treated him with little consideration.

"All the fault, however, was not on their side. What they expected to see was the general result of Mr. Benson's long apprenticeship on tour, as it showed itself in the acting of the players whom he had trained, and who had won for themselves and for him a well-deserved reputation—more especially in towns so critical as Dublin and Edinburgh and Manchester. But Mr. Benson, for some reason unexplained, thought that the critics' hearts would be softened if he came to town with a few well-known London players in his company. He was soon undeceived. Mr. Charles Cartwright, fresh from the Adelphi, was an Iago whom no one could possibly look upon as 'honest'; and Miss Kate Rorke was certainly not seen at her best in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. These and one or two other players, far from giving confidence to the Bensonians, destroyed the harmony of their acting; and so many rehearsals were found necessary that the whole company was tired out before the curtain rose on the first night.

"Perhaps the characters in which Mr. Benson is seen to the best advantage are Shylock, Hamlet, Malvolio, and Dr. Caius. It is worth noting, again, that his company has sometimes been successful where Sir Henry Irving's has failed signally, as in *Twelfth Night;* and one knows, also, that Mr. Tree's *Merry Wives of Windsor* owed much to the Bensonian interpretation of the same comedy."

Miss Ada Ferrar, Miss Beatrice Ferrar, Miss May Allestree, poor Miss Rose Norreys, Mr. Alfred Brydene, Mr. Herbert Ross, Mr. Otho Stuart, Mr. William Mollison, Mr. Athol Forde, and Mr. Hallard—these are some among the many talented actors who have graduated in Mr. Benson's "school." Mr. Stephen Philips, the poet, studied in it too, and played in *rôles* so different as Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Iago. His Iago was the best Mr. Sparrow has seen. Yet another notable member of the band is Mr. Weir, who acted with such unctuous humour both as the grave-digger in *Hamlet*, and as Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.[1]

[1] The latter performance is fixed the more firmly in my memory by a piece of criticism—I am not sure whether it should be called "impressionist" criticism—which the play evoked from a neighbour of mine in the pit. He and a friend who sat with him had come, I think, under a misapprehension; the Globe Theatre had been associated previously in the minds of playgoers with some production of the order of *Charley's Aunt*. But they had been



IRVING AS "KING ARTHUR."

From the drawing by Mr. J. Bernard Partridge.



IRVING AS "KING LEAR"

From the drawing by Mr J. Bernard Partridge.

"London has only three, I think." Did you notice that wise "I think," which Mark Twain tacked on to his statement about our tragedians? And he was careful, too, to name no names—not to publish his awards. He was mindful, perhaps, of the "spretæ injuria formæ," which resulted from Juno's failure in the most famous of all competitive examinations. Had he said, however, "London has only one tragedian," and added "—Irving," no jealousies could have been awakened: Sir Henry is "hors concours."

What a fruitful source of deceptive encouragement to young actors there must lie in the tradition that Henry Irving, the most famous tragedian of our time, met in his earliest efforts upon the stage with complete and almost heart-breaking failure!

He was still, in the eyes of the public, an awkward, pretentious, and second-rate performer, without promise, when Dickens, seeing him in *Uncle Dick's Darling*, gave expression to the prophecy, "This young man will be a great actor." It seems strange that it should have required the keen vision of the novelist to note a something of distinction in the Irving of those days—with his remarkable cast of features, his raven locks and flashing eyes—however self-conscious and stilted may have been his style; but the fact remains that his pre-eminent gifts remained unrecognized (or undeveloped) until many years afterwards, when, on his assumption of the *rôle* of Mathias in *The Bells*, in a half-empty Lyceum, he sprang at one bound into celebrity. He had been acting for over three years in London before this, had taken part both in comedy and in melodrama, and had scored one distinct success—as Digby Grant in *The Two Roses;* but as yet theatre-goers did not suspect that he was anything more than a clever character actor; as Mathias he made their blood run cold and their

amused, both of them, while considerably puzzled, by the singular entertainment for which they had let themselves in—Bottom, especially, had set them off into fits. And when the curtain had fallen and we all rose to go, my neighbour turned to his companion and remarked—employing the word not in its more usual sense, it was clear, but as an epithet of dubious import which should not commit him rashly to a defined opinion—"B——y sort of piece, ain't it, Bill?" And "Bill," even less articulate, grinned acquiescence.

flesh creep—amazed and thrilled and startled them. A successor to the great tragedians, it was felt, had come at last.

His Charles I., his Eugene Aram, his Richelieu, his Philip added to his fame; he had passed his intermediate with flying colours. Over Hamlet, his "final," he set his examiners by the ears. It was a new, a modern Hamlet, and therefore, according as his critics clung to tradition or yearned for novelty, it was banned or blessed; and the play-going world formed two camps—Irvingites and anti-Irvingites—each intolerant of the other. They exist still, these camps, but the Irvingites are in power, and the Opposition (to which most of us, from Mr. Archer downwards, at one time belonged) is weakening and dwindling year by year.

The story of Sir Henry's life has been so often and so ably told, that I need make no excuse for omitting to tell it here. In the eyes of the Future he will figure doubtless as prominently among the actors of this century as Macready, or Kean, or Kemble. Like Macready, he is a great personage as well as a great player, a man of mark and distinction—*in scenâ tanquam republicâ*—words applied, indeed, to other actors, but never with such justification. Like Kemble, he is a splendid figure-head to his profession. Like Kean—but no! I should have to force the comparison: there is no resemblance between him and Kean. That singular genius stands apart in the history of the stage.

From the Lyceum one passes naturally to Her Majesty's. "The Meissonier of the English Stage," some ingenious critic has entitled Mr. Beerbohm-Tree; for the purposes of comparison, let us call Sir Henry its Velasquez. The name of Velasquez will serve as well to suggest the rich and splendid beauty of Irving's greatest impersonations—his Iago, his Shylock, his Benedick, his Richelieu, his Wolsey, his Becket;[1] as will the name of Meissonier the finish, the accurate observation, the love of detail, the versatility of Mr. Tree. Just as

[1] But *not* his Mephistopheles!—that was a Wiertz, or at best a Jan van Beers; and not his Charles I., for that, of course, was a Vandyck—a Vandyck retouched, let us say, by the less delicate, more masculine, hand of Sir Joshua.



Sarony, New York, photo.]

AS "GRINGOIRE."



London Stereoscopic Co., photo.]

AS "FALSTAFF."



Alfred Ellis, photo.]

AS "SVENGALI."



London Stereoscopic Co., photo.]

AS "THE VILLAGE PRIEST."

MR. BEERBOHM TREE.

Meissonier delineated, now some rollicking ne'er-do-weel in his cups, now the repressed despair of a Napoleon, so Mr. Tree passes lightly from tragedy to farce, from vulgarity to refinement.

Versatility indeed is Mr. Tree's *forte*, as the lack of it is Irving's weakness, a weakness inevitable in the case of so strongly marked a personality. The sameness of Irving's gait and gestures, and, above all, of his face—for he seldom condescends to more than a trifling alteration of it, a wisp of moustache, perhaps, a frown, a wrinkle—establishes a distracting and incongruous resemblance between almost all his *rôles*, making Hamlet "more than kin" to Mr. Jingle, and Dr. Primrose an elder brother to Macbeth. Mr. Tree, on the other hand, is the arch-type of the all-round actor. Look at this page of photographs, in which he is to be seen in four of his innumerable contrasts of character. Who could ever connect that libidinous, fat knight with this gentle priest, or Gringoire with Svengali? And it is not a mere matter of making-up; the acting bore out the appearance. "Not one but all mankind's epitome" would seem to be Mr. Tree's ideal.

At the opposite pole to him are those other excellent comedians, Mr. Wyndham, Mr. Hawtrey, and Mr. Hare, whom I tried to characterize when speaking of Jack Bannister. Like Bannister and Sir Squire Bancroft and Mr. Kendal, and, I gather (for I was so unlucky as to miss seeing him), like the American, Mr. William Gillette, these actors, instead of attempting an epitome of all mankind, give us themselves in full. Each of them has his own peculiar gift, inherent in his personality. Mr. Wyndham is above all a Squire of Dames; Mr. Hawtrey (by his leave!) above all a liar; Mr. Hare, a whimsical old "cuss"—a "squint-brain," or a cynic, or a curmudgeon. Always themselves, yet always varying, these actors are always delightful.

Mr. Forbes-Robertson and Mr. George Alexander, as was to be expected from associates of Sir Henry Irving, have sought and achieved success in the plays of Shakespeare as well as in modern dramas of the kind to which Mr. Wyndham

and these others have restricted themselves. But Mr. Forbes-Robertson's success was long in coming to him. Few who witnessed his not very interesting Leontes, in the days when Miss Mary Anderson still lent her wonderful beauty to Perdita and Hermione, would have looked forward to his nobly impressive Buckingham, his picturesque Romeo, his gracious Hamlet. "The Melancholy Dane" it used to be the custom to call Hamlet, but as depicted by Mr. Forbes-Robertson the Dane is no longer melancholy. It would be too much, perhaps, to say that he is lively, but at least he is light-hearted: it is not his temperament, but only his destiny, that is tragic—perhaps the tragedy seems all the greater for that.

Mr. Alexander's Hamlet is yet to come. Meanwhile he is achieving an almost unique reputation as a manager. Think of all the admirable plays he has produced at the St. James's Theatre during the last ten years: *Liberty Hall*, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *Guy Domville*,[1] and last, but not least, Mrs. Craigie's brilliantly-written comedy, *The Ambassador*. Think, too, of the histrionic talent he has found and fostered. Was it not at the St. James's, in *Sunlight and Shadow*, some eight or nine years ago (to mention only the most notable instance out of many), that the powers of Miss Marion Terry began to rival her charms?

There are just twenty-seven other notable actors and actresses of the day—I have their names on a sheet of paper now in front of me—to whom, had I still space, I should strive to repay in appreciation what they have given me in pleasure. That sounds like a mere pedantic euphuism, but it is none the less the truth. Here are three names that

[1] By Mr. Henry James. Its reception was hostile, and it was soon withdrawn, but I cherish the hope that some day Mr. Alexander will revive it. Its opening scene, "The Garden at Porches"—with Miss Marion Terry as the sweet young widow, Mrs. Peverel; Mr. Herbert Waring as Frank Humber, her persistent lover, honest, tender, devoted; and Mr. George Alexander as Guy Domville, her boy's tutor, whom she loves, but who is vowed to the priesthood of the old faith to which they all belong—still lives in my memory as the prettiest and most charming picture I have ever seen upon the stage.

MISS MARY ANDERSON AS "HERMIONE."

From a photograph by Van der Weyde.



MRS. LANGTRY AS "ROSALIND."

From a photograph by Lafayette.





MR. FORBES-ROBERTSON.



MR. BEERBOHM-TREE.



MR. GEORGE ALEXANDER.



SIR SQUIRE BANCROFT.

SOME ACTOR-MANAGERS.

Reproduced, by kind permission, from the "Vanity Fair" Cartoons.

stand together—Edward Terry, Nellie Farren, Fred Leslie; here, in groups and singly, some others: Mr. Coghlan and Mrs. Langtry—her Rosalind, to me, is her most successful *rôle*, and in it she looks her loveliest; Mr. Bourchier (Mrs. Langtry's admirable Jaques) and Miss Violet and Miss Irene Vanbrugh; Mr. Cyril Maude, Miss Winifred Emery, and Mr. Mark Kinghorne; Miss Jessie Bond and Mr. George Grossmith; Mr. Weedon Grossmith, Mr. Brandon Thomas, Mrs. John Wood, and all the Broughs; Miss Alma Murray, Mr. "Bernard Gould," Miss Elizabeth Robins, Mr. Lewis Waller, Miss Kate Rorke, Miss Lily Hanbury, Mr. Eric Lewis, Miss Cissie Loftus, Miss Annie Hughes—but it were useless to complete the list. These, and the many others with whose careers I am less well acquainted—Mr. Thomas Thorne, for instance, and Miss Eastlake and Miss Fortescue—I must leave to the future historian of the English stage. In the scant space still left to me I could not do justice to them. Here, regretfully, I must write—

FINIS.

APPENDIX I

M. Adolphe Beau, whose theatrical photographs form so important a feature of this volume, has been good enough to comply with my request that he should supplement my chapter on "The Stage in the 'Sixties" by some personal reminiscences. I give his entertaining letter *verbatim.* He preferred to write in English. Forty years in London have impaired his French, it seems, though not his French vivacity!

"Dear Sir,

"In reply to your appeal to my memory on the subject of 'Theatrical Reminiscences during the 'Sixties' I send you herewith, *currente calamo*, what I can gather from the utmost corners of my brain, after such a lapse of time.

"Perhaps I might be allowed to mention my having been one of the pioneers of photography in this country? There were indeed very few photographers in London at the time when, with Silvy, I introduced the 'full-length *cartes-de-visite.*' We thought the best plan for this purpose was to produce at first a series of theatrical portraits, thus enabling the public to judge what they would be like as regards likeness and artistic treatment. Therefore the studio of Porchester Terrace became the *rendezvous* of the most eminent in the 'Profession.' Later on, in my studio in Regent Street, I followed in the same strain, and I possess a most important and unique collection of the first dramatic portraits of the period.

"It is a very remarkable fact that most actors, when finding themselves in broad daylight, seemed, as it were, quite *dépaysés* and to have lost the actual remembrance of their exact poses and expression before the footlights, and I had often to quote the words to promote the attitudes.

"ROBSON.—'*À tout Seigneur tout honneur!*' I shall begin with ROBSON. The genius of this remarkable man spread on all his performances such a wonderful humour and power that it always commanded from his audience the most profound attention, and his movements were followed with an all-absorbing interest. In private, he displayed the same intensity of expression. One day, coming to the studio for a sitting, he mentioned to me that he had the burglars in his house on the previous night, and in relating the circumstance he made me feel by his earnestness what a deep impression of nervousness he experienced on the occasion. In fact, he appeared as if he was afraid they might still be in one of the adjoining rooms!

"During one of his performances, when he was singing the song of 'Vilikins and his Dinah,' his demeanour and the tone of his accents were so awfully ludicrous that the audience burst out in a huge laughter, upon which he stopped short immediately; then advancing to the footlights in a solemn manner, and assuming a most serious expression, ejaculated in a sort of reproachful tone: 'Ladies and gentlemen, this is NOT a comic song!' Of course, this remark brought down the house, and some minutes elapsed ere he could proceed.

"In his character as 'The Yellow Dwarf' he was positively astounding. Painted, of course, yellow all over, with very large ears, and such a gait! One might have thought of a sudden apparition of some supernatural being. He was so dis-humanized, if I may be allowed to coin such a word. His characters in *Boots at the Swan*, *Porter's Knot*, etc., were also marked with a special touch of originality difficult to equal.

"H. WIDDICOMB.—This clever comic actor was indeed drollery itself. In the *Two Polts*, when his busby was constantly falling off his head, and also in the character of Bertrand, played to Fechter's Robert Macaire, he was inimitable; while his performance of the grave-digger in *Hamlet* (also with Fechter) was absolutely perfect, and, I believe, has always been acknowledged as such.

"CHARLES MATHEWS.—This portrait of Charles Mathews may well be described as 'MATHEWS AT HOME,' as it was taken at his residence, Gore Lodge, Fulham. He was one day giving



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

FECHTER AND HIS SON IN "THE MOUNTEBANK."



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

HENRY NEVILLE AS "BOB BRIERLEY" IN
"THE TICKET-OF-LEAVE MAN."

me a sitting at Regent Street in company with his charming wife, when I requested him to speak while the photograph was being taken. (It is well to notice that we had then neither dry plates nor instantaneous process ; negatives were taken on collodion, and the sittings ranged from four to eight seconds, my system having always been to produce 'half-tones,' before any other photographic consideration. I am afraid the facilities now afforded by the mode of operating have been detrimental to the careful study of 'effects of light,' which require for their production a constant modification of the time of exposure of the plate or film. 'Instantaneous' is all very well as a facility for the operator, but it is certainly detrimental to the study of 'Art in Photography,' which too often seems reduced to a 'mechanical trick.' Pray excuse this digression from the subject, but I particularly wished to say that 'speaking portraits' *cannot* be satisfactorily produced by the instantaneous process, for the simple reason that you mostly represent, then, *the mouth quite open*, while, with a long exposure, you obtain the *résultante* of the expression of the mouth and features during the operation.) In compliance with my request Charles Mathews spoke, and as he said something funny[1] his words brought a smile on Mrs. Mathews's face—they were standing arm in arm—the speaking produced a double effect, the smile proving at the same time that he had been speaking.

"Paul Bedford and Toole in the *Family Jars* were a combination seldom to be met with, and nothing more ludicrous than the scene represented in the photograph could be imagined. Toole is holding his pocket-book and trying to draw from the old man as much as he can get for the dowry of his daughter, whom he intends to marry.

"Marie Wilton.—What could I say that has not been said of this extraordinarily clever, versatile, mirth-producing and bewitching actress, Marie Wilton (now Lady Bancroft)? I believe the portrait in the riding-habit will convey exactly to old playgoers the remembrance of her charming and unsophisticated expression.

[1] He said, "Look at that humbug who wants to take my portrait while speaking!" (It made *me* smile too!)

"EMERY.—A most clever actor. I remember him in *The Duke's Motto*, when, a bluff soldier, he was on sentry, and on inquiry being made from him which way Lagardère had gone he replied in a blunt military tone: 'He is gone to the devil, if you know the way!'

"FECHTER.—This eminent actor has occupied so large a place in the period, and has received such praise for his performances in *The Duke's Motto*, *Bel Demonio*, *Master of Ravenswood*, etc., and his various interpretations of the characters in Shakespeare's plays, that I will simply mention that he was leading the life of a *bon bourgeois*, surrounded by his devoted wife, his son and daughter. He received a few friends on the Sunday, the only day he had free, considering his absorbing occupations during the week. Some game of bagatelle or billiards helped to spend the evening after dinner. Certainly nothing less ostentatious could be imagined.

"He was constantly occupied with the various details of *mise-en-scène* and accessories for his plays, and I recollect Horace Wigan deploring one day his too conscientious devotion to the perfection of scenery, all too substantial, and more so to the 'realism' of the accessories, such as real gems for the ballet, etc., etc., as well as costumes far too substantial and costly; also, Horace Wigan was telling me that a third or fourth of the price paid for all these would have been quite sufficient without deterring from the effect.

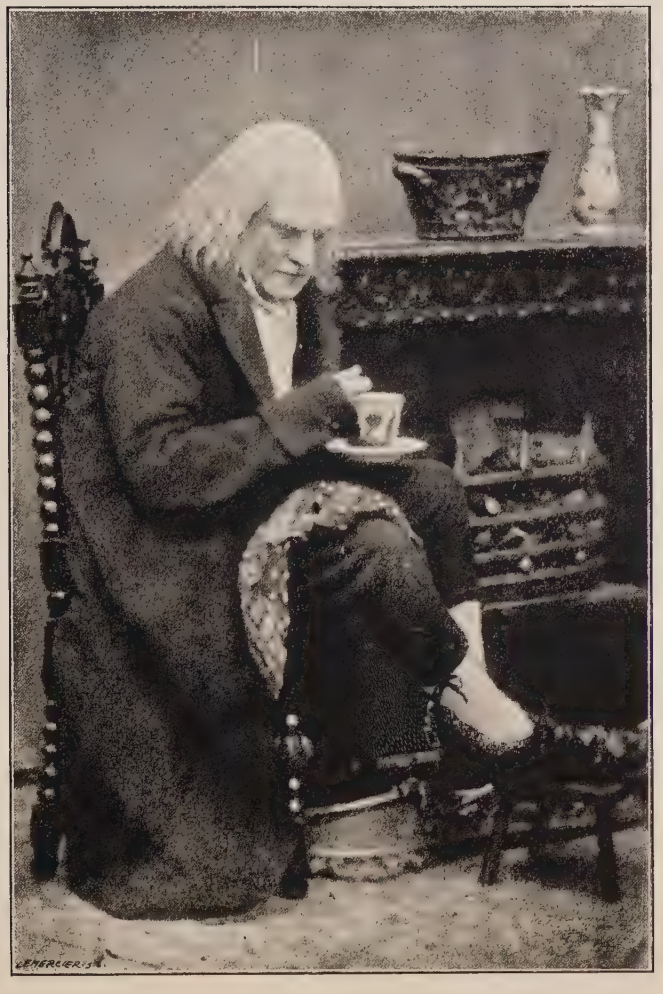
"His son, Paul Fechter, a youth of great promise, whom he tried to bring out as an actor (as represented in the photograph), did not answer to his expectations, but later on, in his studies in Paris, he was getting on most successfully, when he was unfortunately killed in a fencing match, the foil of his antagonist having pierced his eye. His father, having died some time previously in America, was spared a great sorrow.

"KATE TERRY.—If it were not being guilty of a sort of anachronism, one might say that Kate Terry had been the Ellen Terry of Fechter. It is not of common occurrence that such eminent actors have the good fortune of meeting with such partners in art as did Fechter and Sir Henry Irving. Kate Terry, in the mesmerism scene in *The Duke's Motto*—when



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

ALFRED WIGAN IN "THE ISLE OF ST. TROPEZ."



Adolphe Beau, photo.]

HORACE WIGAN IN "THE CHIMNEY-CORNER."

Blanche de Nevers learns from Lagardère, in the disguise of a Hunchback, who he really is—conveyed in her features an expression of trance and delight which penetrated the spectators. It was, indeed, one of the most sensational scenes in the whole play. This charming actress, 'the loveliness in person' (to translate a French idiom), has spread 'a great lustre' on all Fechter's performances.

"Ellen Terry.—Here I am treading on the actual! Therefore I shall only say that when you are contemplating a splendid picture, you do not require to be told of its beauty!

"Alfred Wigan.—The photograph represents this great actor in the play of *The Isle of St. Tropez*, at the St. James's Theatre, then under the management of the graceful and ladylike Miss Herbert, who took a prominent part in the performance, in which both were really splendid. One could say of Alfred Wigan that he was *the gentleman* of the stage.

"Horace Wigan.—Like his brother Alfred, Horace Wigan was a remarkable French scholar, so much so that he could have been mistaken for a Frenchman. His performance testified to a profound study on his part. His Old Man in *The Chimney-Corner* did anticipate the style of that celebrated actor, Mr. Hare. As for his 'make-up,' it was always perfect.

"Mr. and Mrs. Keeley.—I shall now conclude with these 'old favourites,' who did shine so vividly in the period, and it is a satisfaction to think that we still possess among us, with Mrs. Keeley, the representative of a fame that has filled up the dramatic epoch alluded to in these pages.

"I am, Dear Sir,

"Yours very truly,

"Adolphe Beau."

Note.—M. Beau permits me to mention that enlarged Bromide copies of his theatrical photographs reproduced in this book may be obtained on application to Messrs. Spooner and Co., 379, Strand, W.C.

APPENDIX II

It is interesting to note what Drury Lane and Covent Garden had to offer in the way of dramatic entertainment in the year 1800. Genest enables us to do so. Here, rearranged in parallel columns, is the substance of his chronicle for the first six months.

Drury Lane.	Covent Garden.
Jan.	*Jan.*
1. *The Belle's Stratagem.*	7. *The Beaux' Stratagem.*
2. *A Bold Stroke for a Wife.*	11. *Abroad and at Home.*
6. *Love makes a Man.*	16. *Joanna.* [A romance of the fourteenth century in five acts, with songs and choruses. Scene: Switzerland. Adapted by Cumberland from Kotzebue. Genest quotes Cumberland's preface, in which he declares his objections to these German dramas, and explains that he had "strong reasons" (financial evidently) for undertaking *Joanna.* Acted fourteen times. Emery and Incledon, the famous singer, in the cast.]
25. *Adelaide.* [A tragedy by Pye, the Poet Laureate, founded on Lyttleton's "History of Henry II." Scene: Chinon in France. Some parts of it well written, says Genest, but on the whole dull and uninteresting; Kemble and Mrs. Siddons "said never to have appeared to less advantage." Acted three times.]	22. *Birthday*, *West Indian*, and *Peeping Tom.*
Feb.	*Feb.*
1. *Of Age To-morrow.* [A "very good farce with songs," adapted from Kotzebue by Dibdin. Acted thirty-six times. Suett, Bannister, and Miss Stephens, the singer, in the cast.]	3. *Mysteries of the Castle.* Munden in the cast.]
6. *Rule a Wife.*	8. *Speed the Plough.* [A "pretty good comedy" by Morton. Acted forty-one times. Munden and Fawcett in the cast.]
12. *The School for Scandal.*	19. *True Friends.* [A musical entertainment by Dibdin. Acted five times. Emery and Incledon in the cast.]
15. *The Rivals.*	
22. *The Castle Spectre.*	

DRURY LANE.

March.

11. *The Egyptian Festival.* [A very poor opera in three acts by Franklin. Acted ten times. C. Kemble and Miss Stephens in the cast.]

April.

16. Mrs. Jordan as Rosalind.

28. Bannister's Benefit: *She would and she would not* and *Children, or Give them their Way.*

29. *De Montfort.* [A tragedy by Miss Joanna Baillie. One of the series in which she delineated the Passions. Scene: A German town. "A very interesting tragedy," says Genest, "the language sometimes exquisitely beautiful." (Sir Walter Scott, it may be remembered, shared the prevailing admiration for Miss Baillie's work—"chaste and elegant, elevated and impressive," are the epithets her contemporaries applied to her literary style.) But its success was due chiefly, he thinks, to the acting of Kemble and Mrs. Siddons.]

May.

5. Mrs. Siddons's Benefit: *De Montfort.*

10. *Indiscretion.* [A moderate comedy by Hoare. Acted six times. Bannister and Mrs. Jordan in the cast.]

12. Mrs. Jordan's Benefit: *The Inconstant.*

14. Kelly's Benefit: *The Haunted Tower.*

COVENT GARDEN.

March.

27. *The Belle's Stratagem.* [Lewis and Munden in the cast.]

31. *St. David's Day, or the Honest Welchman.* [Fawcett, Munden, and Incledon.]

April.

5. Lewis's Benefit: *How to grow Rich.* [Munden and Fawcett.]

15. Incledon's Benefit: *Woodman.* [Munden and Emery.]

17. Holman's Benefit: *Votary of Wealth.*

19. Pope's Benefit: *Lovers' Vows* and *Lock and Key.*

22. Munden's Benefit: *The Good-natured Man.* [First time for twelve years.]

24. *Secrets worth Knowing.*

26. Fawcett's Benefit: *Heir at Law.*

29. Mr. and Mrs. H. Johnston's Benefit: *Douglas.* [*Douglas*, though Dr. Johnson declared roundly that there were not ten good lines in it, had been hailed as a masterpiece by Gray, David Hume, and other eminent men. When the curtain had fallen on its first performance at Covent Garden (in 1782) an enthusiastic Scot rose up in the pit and exclaimed exultingly to the Southron audience—"Whaur's your Wully Shakespeare, the noo?"]

30. Knight's Benefit: *Gingham.*

May.

1. *The Miser* and *Paul and Virginia.* [A musical piece in two acts.]

2. Mrs. Mattock's Benefit: *The Deserted Daughter.*

10. Betterton's Benefit: *The School for Wives and Honest Thieves.*

12. *Liberal Opinions.* [Comedy in three acts.]

13. Mrs. Pope's Benefit: *Cymbeline* and *A Child of Nature.*

DRURY LANE.

May.

20. *Pizarro.* [Sixty-seventh time.]
21. Barrymore and Walker's Benefit: *She Stoops to Conquer.*
22. Miss Bigg's Benefit: *Indiscretion.*
29. Sedgwick's Benefit: *The Egyptian Festival* and *Strangers at Home.*
30. *The Country Girl.*

June.

3. Miss Leak's Benefit: *She would and she would not* and *Robin Hood.*
5. Trueman's Benefit: *The Clandestine Marriage* and *Three Weeks after Marriage.*
11. *The Mountaineers.*
17. *Love for Love.*
18. Lacy's Benefit.

COVENT GARDEN.

May.

17. Miss Waters' Benefit: *Speculation.*
20. *The Rivals.*
27. *Wild Oats.*
28. Benefit of Emery, Mrs. Johnson, and Mrs. Dibdin: *Wives as they were.*
29. Brandon's Benefit: *A Chapter of Accidents* and *The Spoiled Child.*

June.

2. Wild's Benefit: *Fashionable Levities, Five Thousand a Year,* and *Don Juan.*
7. *Busy-Body.*
10. *The Beggar's Opera.*
12. Under the patronage of the Prince of Wales. Benefit of O'Keefe, the dramatist. *Lie of the Day, Alibi, Three Weeks after Marriage,* and *Paul and Virginia.* [Quick, after an absence of three years from the stage, and Mrs. Jordan among the performers.]
13. For Benefit of the Bayswater Hospital. *The Duenna* [Quick in the cast] and *Sultan* [Mrs. Jordan in the cast].

Genest concludes his Covent Garden record with an account (which reads quaintly nowadays) of a dispute between the proprietors and eight of the principal actors—J. G. Holman, Jack Johnstone, Pope, Munden, Incledon, Fawcett, Knight, and H. S. Johnston. Holman drew up a memorandum of their grievances and presented it to the Marquis of Salisbury, then Lord Chamberlain. Lord Salisbury replied that he could not interfere in private disputes, but that if they wished he would act as arbitrator. To this both sides assented. Among the grievances were the increase from £5 to £30 of the fine for refusing characters, the increase of the charge for benefits from £140 to £160, and a new rule, described as the "Sick Clause," by which the proprietors hoped to put a stop to the too frequent feigning of illness on the part of the performers.

On all these points their own umpire gave it against them. "If not correct on every point," says Genest, "Lord Salisbury gave his verdict with great moderation and propriety."

The Drury Lane programme from September 16th to December 31st differs from that of the early months of the year chiefly in regard to Shakespeare. The season begins with *Hamlet*, followed a few days later by *Richard III.*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, *King John*, and *As You Like It* are all given in November. The only new pieces produced are *Virginia*, an opera by Mrs. Plowden, damned on the first night, October 30th, and *Antonio, or the Soldier's Return*, Godwin's tragedy, from Lamb's account of which I have quoted in Chapter III. The Covent Garden record is notable only for the first appearance in London of George Frederick Cooke on October 31st as Richard III.; here, also, there were but two novelties, a feeble comedy by Reynolds and a poor comic opera taken "from the new Arabian Tales" and introducing Haroun Al Rashid.

In 1800 the Haymarket's repertory was as follows:

THE HAYMARKET.

June.

13. *The Heir at Law.* [Emery's first appearance here.]
17. *Zarmeski* [C. Kemble in the cast] and *'Tis all a Farce.* [Fawcett, Emery, and T. Palmer in the cast.]
25. *Sighs* and *Fortune's Frolic.*
26. *The Surrender of Calais.*

July.

5. *Ways and Means.* [A pantomime acted nine times.]
14. *The London Hermit.*
15. *The Point of Honour.* [Adapted by C. Kemble from the French. "Rather a tragedy than a comedy." Acted nineteen times. C. Kemble, Fawcett, and Suett in the cast.]

August.

2. Bannister's Benefit: *Inkle and Yerrico* and *Castle of Sorrento.*
7. *The Iron Chest* and *The Village Lawyer.*
12. C. Kemble's Benefit: *The School for Scandal.*
14. *What a Blunder.* Opera in three acts. [Jack Johnstone in Irish *rôle.*]
15. *Guardians.*
23. Mrs. Bland's Benefit: *The Mountaineers.*
26. Mrs. Mountain's Benefit: *Poor Soldiers.*
29. Johnstone's Benefit: *Cambro Britons.*

September.

2. *Sighs* and *Review, or The Wags of Windsor.*
3. Mrs. Gibbs's Benefit: *The Birthday.*
5. *The Point of Honour.*
6. *The Jew.*

November.

17. Bannister's Benefit: *Ways and Means*, *The Son-in-Law*, and *Babes in the Wood.*

APPENDIX III

SOME ADDITIONAL ILLUSTRATIONS



Window and Grove, photo.]

MISS ELLEN TERRY AS "LADY MACBETH."



Window and Grove, photo.]

MISS ELLEN TERRY AND MR. GORDON CRAIG IN "THE DEAD HEART."



Bassano, photo.]

MR. WILLIAM TERRISS.



Alfred Ellis, photo.]

MR. WILLIAM GILLETTE.



Alfred Ellis, photo.]

MR. GEORGE ALEXANDER. MISS MAUDE MILLETT.
MISS MARION TERRY. MR. E. M. ROBSON.

A SCENE FROM "LIBERTY HALL."



London Stereoscopic Company, photo.]

MR. FRED LESLIE AND MISS NELLIE FARREN IN A "GAIETY" BURLESQUE.



Alfred Ellis, photo.]

MISS EMMIE OWEN. MISS FLORENCE PERRY. MISS JESSIE BOND.

THE "THREE LITTLE MAIDS FROM SCHOOL"
("THE MIKADO").



Alfred Ellis, photo.]

MRS. PATRICK CAMPBELL AND MR. GEORGE ALEXANDER IN "THE SECOND MRS. TANQUERAY."



Alfred Ellis, photo.]

MR. HERBERT WARING, "FRANK HUMBER." MISS MARION TERRY, "MRS. PEVEREL." MR. GEORGE ALEXANDER, "GUY DOMVILLE." MR. W. G. ELLIOT, "LORD DEVENISH."

A SCENE FROM "GUY DOMVILLE," BY HENRY JAMES.



Alfred Ellis, photo.]

MR. ERNEST HENDRIE, "JACK BUNCOMBE."

MR. CHARLES HAWTREY, "HERBERT JOCELYN."

(*"The biggest liar in Mr. Hawtrey's whole brazen gallery."—"W.A." in "The World."*)

MRS. CHARLES CALVERT, "MRS. LAMBERT."

MISS JESSIE BATEMAN, "ROSIE JOCELYN."

A SCENE FROM "THE 'SAUCY SALLY.'"

INDEX[1]

WRITERS

À Beckett, Mr. Arthur Wm., 147.
Archer, Mr. William, 6, 7, 8, 39, 40, 76, 78, 86, 109, 167, 178, 179.
"Atlantic Monthly, The," 150, 155.

Baker, H. Barton, 4, 13, 15, 24, 25, 104, 105 115, 129, 147, 165, 166 167.
Barrett, Mr. Lawrence, 89.
Beau, M. Adolphe, 156, 189.
Beerbohm, Mr. Max, 175.
"Blackwood's Magazine," 3.
Boaden, 8, 43, 52.
Booth, Edwin, 72, 73, 75.
Boucicault, Dion, 149.

Campbell, Thomas, 22, 24, 37, 41.
Compton, Mr. Herbert, 163.
Cook, Mr. Dutton, 54, 95, 98, 114, 115.
Curtis, Mr. George William, 154.

"Daily Telegraph, The," 173, 178.

Filon, M. Augustin, 5, 115, 153, 160.
Fiske, Mr. Stephen, 110.
FitzGerald, Mr. Percy, 156.
Forbes-Robertson, Mr. John, 132, 133, 137.
Forster, John, 109, 110.

Gautier, Théophile, 106.
Genest, 8, 34, 45, 63.
Gould, Mr., 71, 72.
Grattan, Henry, 60, 61.

Hatton, Mr. Joseph, 162.
Hawkins, Mr. Frederick W., 67.
Hazlitt, William, 3, 8, 9, 10, 17, 42, 62, 63, 64, 68, 82, 96, 97, 176.
Henley, Mr. W. E., 158.
Hopkins, Mr. Tighe, 158.
Hunt, Leigh, 2, 8, 9, 10, 11, 23, 35, 42, 43, 51, 56, 64, 65, 66, 68, 82, 96, 175.
Hutton, Mr. Laurence, 22.

Irving, Washington, 32.

Kent, Mr. Charles, 99.
Knight, Mr. Joseph, 39, 44, 157, 167, 168, 169, 177.

Lamb, Charles, 3, 26, 27, 28, 41, 47, 49, 50, 55, 56, 57, 58, 81.
Lewes, George Henry, 88, 89, 93, 112, 113, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 137, 146.
Low, Mr. Robert, 7.

Macready, William Charles, 59, 96.
Marston, Westland, 31, 100, 115, 120, 121, 123, 124, 125, 126, 128, 130.
Matthews, Mr. Brander, 22.
McDonagh, Mr. Michael, 108.
Morley, Professor Henry, 5, 114, 133, 134, 135, 136, 138, 141, 142, 144, 148.
"Morning Post, The," 20.

"Old Playgoer, The" (see Robson, William).

[1] In the case both of "Writers" and of "Actors" a number of merely incidental references have been omitted.

Oxberry's "Dramatic Biography," 34, 49, 56.

Pearson, Dr. C. A., 179.
Phelps, Mr. W. May, 132, 133, 137.
Pinero, Mr. A. W., 136, 137.
Pollock, Sir Frederick, 91.
Pollock, Lady, 77, 79, 92, 93.
"Punch," 130.

Reid, Mr. Erskine, 163, 164.
Robson, William ("The Old Playgoer"), 10, 11, 12, 36, 37, 40, 42, 45, 46, 51, 52, 68, 69.

Sala, George Augustus, 118, 119, 142, 143.
Scott, Sir Walter, 27, 29.
Scott, Mr. Clement, 139, 141, 169, 170, 171, 172.
Shaw, Mr. George Bernard, 153, 165, 170, 175, 176, 177.
Shaw-Sparrow, Mr. Walter, 181, 182.
Sherwood, M. E. W., 155, 156.
Stedman, Mr. Edmund Clarence, 155.

Talfourd, 9, 52, 69, 70, 127.
Tennyson, Lord, 90.
"Times, The," 153.
Traill, Mr. H. D., 171.
Twain, Mark, 179, 183.

Vandenhoff, George, 70, 71, 108.
Vezin, Hermann, 109.

Walkley, Mr. A. B., 4, 170, 173, 174.
Wallack, Lester, 152.
Ward, Professor A. W., 143.
Whitman, Walt, 74.

Yates, Edmund, 116.

ACTORS

Alexander, Mr. George, 6, 164, 186.
Anderson, James, 86.
Anderson, Miss Mary, 6, 186.

Baird, Miss Dorothea, 165.
Bancroft, Lady (Marie Wilton), 117, 159.
Bancroft, Sir Squire, 37, 160, 185.
Bancrofts, The, 1, 5-6, 160-162.
Bannister, Jack, 2, 36-38, 176.
Barrett, Mr. Wilson, 6.
Benson, Mr. F. R., 180-182.
Bensley, 50.
Betty, William Henry West ("Young Roscius"), 34, 35.
Beveridge, Mr. J. D., 45.
Billington, Mrs., 16.
Booth, Edwin, 154-156.
Booth, Junius Brutus, 71-75.
Boucicault, Dion, 5, 153-154.
Boucicault, Mrs., 154.
Boyne, Mr. Leonard, 45.
Brooke, Gustavus V., 137-138.
Buckstone, J. B., 116, 123-124, 166.

Campbell, Mrs. Patrick, 6, 172, 173-174.
Cecil, Mr. Arthur, 161.
Céleste, Madame, 116.
Clarke, John, 156.
Clarke, John S., 156-157.
Compton, 166.
Cooke, George Frederick, 2, 33-34.
Cooke, T. P., 12, 32, 33, 34.
Cushman, Miss Charlotte, 104, 105, 117.

Dalton, Mr. Charles, 172.
Dillon, Charles, 117.

Elliston, Robert William, 3, 36, 49, 55-58.
Emery, John, 51, 52.
Esmond, Mr. H. V., 165.

Fairbrother, Miss Sydney, 165.
Farren, Miss Nellie, 13, 187.
Farren, Old, 53-54.
Farren, Mr. William, 53, 54, 166, 167.
Faucit, Helen, 86, 105-107.
Fawcett, John, 51.
Fechter, Charles, 5, 117, 145-148.
Forbes-Robertson, Mr. Johnston, 6, 132, 161, 172, 180.
Forrest, Edwin, 109-111.
Freear, Miss Louie, 165.

Glover, Mrs., 79, 94-95, 117.
Grimaldi, 13.

Hare, Mr. John, 6, 37, 161, 171, 185.
Hawtrey, Mr. Charles, 37, 185.
Horton, Miss Priscilla, 86.
Howe, Henry, 86.

Irving, Sir Henry, 1, 6, 105, 166, 167, 168, 171, 180, 184, 185.

Jefferson, Joseph, 148-151,
Johnstone, "Irish," 45-46.
Jordan, Mrs., 2, 38-43, 100, 176.

Kean, Charles, 4, 117, 126-130, 168.
Kean, Edward, 1, 2, 3, 59-71, 72, 73, 75, 95, 131, 184.
Keeley, Mr. and Mrs., 87, 117, 122, 123.
Kelly, Miss F. M., 98-99.
Kemble, Charles, 3, 30, 31, 103.
Kemble, Miss Fanny, 100-104.
Kemble, John Philip, 1, 2, 11, 17, 18, 21, 26-30, 36, 131, 184.
Kemble, Stephen, 31, 32.
Kendal, Mr., 161, 177.
Kendal, Mrs., 161, 167, 177, 179.

Larkin, Miss, 160.
Lewis, 3, 50.
Liston, 3, 49, 51-52.

Macready, William Charles, 1, 3, 4, 58, 76-93, 100, 101, 131.
Marston, Henry, 166.
Mathews, The Elder, 3, 53, 117.
Mathews, Charles, The Younger, 53, 87, 120-122.
Matthews, Frank, 166.
Mellon, Harriet (afterwards Mrs. Coutts and Duchess of St. Albans), 43-45.
Millard, Miss Evelyn, 164.
Munden, Joseph, 2, 47-49.
Murray, Leigh, 124, 125.

Neilson, Miss Adelaide, 107, 157-158.
Nisbett, Mrs., 87, 99-100.

O'Neill, Miss, 95-97.
O'Sullivan, Mr. Denis, 46.

Phelps, Samuel, 4, 86, 87, 130-137.
Power, Tyrone, 86, 108.

Quick, 50.

Rehan, Miss Ada, 6, 174, 175.
Reeve, John, 116.
Ristori, Madame, 5, 143-144.
Robson, Mr. E. M., 137.
Robson, Frederick, 5, 13, 118, 139-143.

Siddons, Mrs., 2, 17-26, 36, 102, 105, 143.
Smithson, Miss, 97-98.
Sothern, E. A., 151-153.
Stirling, Mrs., 125.
Suett, "Dicky," 2, 49-50.

Terry, Mr. Edward, 6, 171, 187.
Terry, Miss Ellen, 6, 169, 171, 174, 180.
Terry, Miss Kate, 117, 147, 160.
Toole, Mr., 6, 116, 161-162.
Tree, Mr. Beerbohm, 6, 172, 184.
Tree, Mrs. Beerbohm, 171.
Tree, Miss Ellen (Mrs. Charles Kean), 86.

Vandenhoff, George, 108.
Vandenhoff, John, 107.
Vestris, Madame, 87, 117, 120-122.

Wallack, James, 111, 117.
Waring, Mr. Herbert, 6, 164.
Warner, Mrs., 137.
Warner, Mr. Charles, 118.
Webster, Benjamin, 116, 118, 123-126, 168.
Welch, Mr. James, 165.
Wigan, Alfred, 119, 193.
Wigan, Horace, 192, 193.
Willard, Mr., 6.
Wright, Edward, 116, 166.
Wyndham, Mr. Charles, 6, 37, 152, 171, 185.

Young, Charles Mayne, 23, 34.

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